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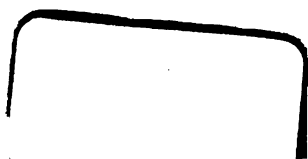
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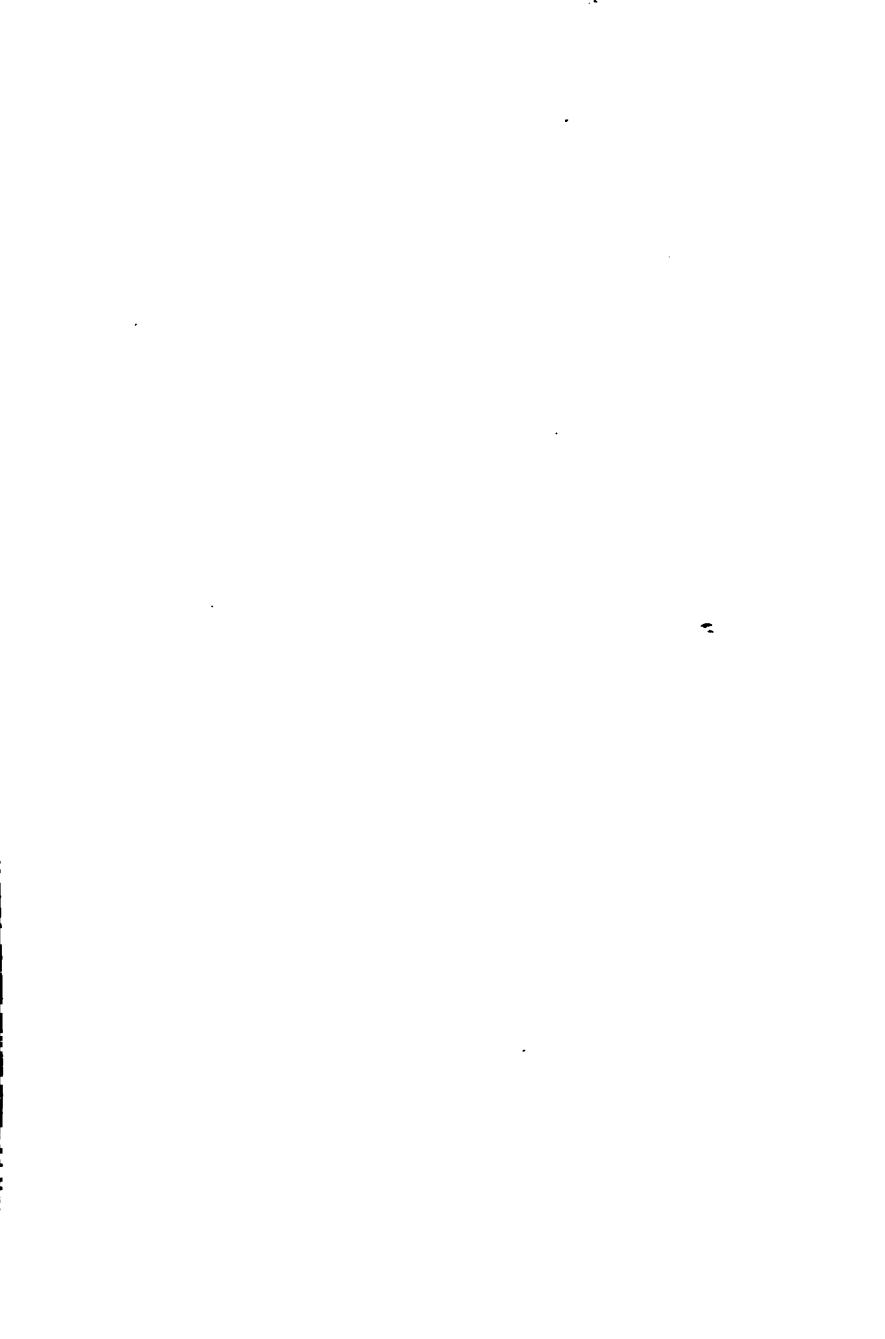
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HUNTING FOR GOLD





We were suspected of being dangerous Criminals.

Hunting for Gold

OR

Adventures in Klondyke

BY

HUME NISBET

I

Author of

'Bail Up,' 'The Swampers'

'The Bushranger's Sweetheart'

'Kings of the Sea,' Etc., Etc., Etc.

Illustrated by HAL HURST

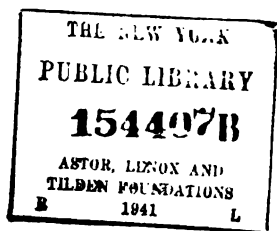
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Dedication

TO MY DEAR FRIEND
ELISHA WASHINGTON RAJACK
OF KLONDYKE

I BEG TO OFFER MY BOOK
IN RECOGNITION OF HIS KINDNESS
IN GIVING ME INFORMATION
ABOUT THE GOLD FIELDS
OF THE NORTH

Winnipeg 24 Oct 41



P R E F A C E

TWO years ago a friend of mine went out to the Yukon Valley. From the letters he sent me I have written the following story; also, as a slight acknowledgment of my deep obligation, I beg to dedicate this work to him.

Perhaps I may be blamed for getting my adventurers too easily and quickly up to Dawson City. There are not many Argonauts so favoured by fate, I must admit, if my friend is to be believed; but I did not like to harrow the minds of my readers with too much realism.

The horrors of that overland journey cannot possibly be pictured with words: they must be experienced before they could be understood. In England we sometimes experience weather that makes us shiver and fly to the fireside as soon as possible. But that is not cold when compared to what is known in Klondyke and on the route to it.

Try to recall, however, your sensations on the coldest day or night you have ever known; try

to intensify the most bitter ice blast that has ever pierced your marrow by a thousandfold; even then you will not be able to realise spring in the Chilkoot Canyon, far less midwinter on the Klondyke. It may help you a little, however, if you do this exercise of the imagination, to follow my gold hunters in their search after the yellow dust.

With these few words I beg to leave my story in your hands, trusting that it may interest you for an hour or two.

It is a winter's tale, and likely to be enjoyed best if you have a cosy fireside, with a bright lamp, and outside the drawn shutters a good Christmas North Sea snow gale blowing over the land. Take it up on such a night, and that you may be satisfied with the efforts to entertain you is the fervent wish of your humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

VORICK CLUB,
BEAUFORT BUILDINGS,
STRAND, W.C., 1897.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MY FIRST FLIGHT	I
II. THE WORLD ISN'T QUITE WHAT YOUNG BIRDS FANCY IT	11
III. WE RETURN SADLY	23
IV. A PHILOSOPHIC FATHER	34
V. I GET MY SHIP	43
VI. MY FIRST VOYAGE	52
VII. MY SECOND VOYAGE	63
VIII. THE WRECK OF THE 'ASTARLU'	72
IX. WE LEAVE ENGLAND ONCE MORE	80
X. PAUL RAVENWOOD	91
XI. ON THE GREAT PACIFIC RAILWAY	102
XII. OVER THE YACULTA MÆLSTROM	113
XIII. A GAME OF POKER	123
XIV. WE REACH DYEA	133
XV. IN CAMP AT DYEA	143
XVI. IN THE CHILKOOT PASS	152
XVII. OUR CAMP AT LAKE BENNETT	162
XVIII. THROUGH THE RAPIDS	171
XIX. AT DAWSON CITY	182
XX. THE REASON WHY PAUL CAME TO KLONDYKE	192
XXI. DAWSON CITY LIFE	202

CHAP.	PAGE
XXII. THE HUSBAND OF WINIFRED . . .	213
XXIII. WINIFRED ASSERTS HERSELF . . .	221
XXIV. NUMBER FIVE . . .	231
XXV. THE RUSH UPON RAVENWOOD . . .	241
XXVI. A NARROW ESCAPE . . .	250
XXVII. ON THE TRAIL . . .	258
XXVIII. AN INDIAN GAME . . .	268
XXIX. THE END . . .	279

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

HAL HURST

	PAGE
'WE WERE SUSPECTED OF BEING DANGEROUS CRIMINALS'	16
'THEN COMMENCED A SCENE WHICH MUST HAVE WRUNG THE CAPTAIN'S HEART'	75
'TOWARDS MORNING THE WIND BEGAN BLOWING AN- OTHER TORNADO'	155
'TWO OR THREE MINUTES WERE ALL WE TOOK OVER THAT FIRST QUARTER-OF-A-MILE OF SWIRLING WATERS'	180
'POOR PETE GLEN ON THE EARTH AND WINIFRED BESIDE HIM'	255
'BOTH WERE CALM AS STOICS AS THEY SHUFFLED AND DREW THE CARDS'	276

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HUNTING FOR GOLD

CHAPTER I

MY FIRST FLIGHT

WHEN I was about twelve years old I began to think that my father wasn't quite the great hero that I had considered him to be in my more callow days.

He was a sensible old man ; of course, every boy's father ought to be that if nothing else. He kept us all comfortable enough at home, and managed, somehow, to raise what we required in the way of food, clothes and lodgings. Neither was he too severe, as some of my schoolmates' dads were—acting the spy on them, and putting all kinds of bad thoughts into their heads by suspicious questions.

No, my dad wasn't that sort of man. He left us free enough to come and go as we liked. He didn't ask us either where we had been, or what we had been doing, but left us to tell that, if we liked, ourselves. We had each a latch key for the

front door, so as not to bother those inside to rise from their chairs to open when we wanted to come in.

Now, the curious thing about having a latch key is this, to a boy, at least ; it takes all the excitement out of life, and seems to rob one of any desire to stay out late. That was one of my complaints about dad—the giving me that latch key. While all my other friends were enjoying the pleasures of a forbidden half-hour, it was nothing to me, as no one found fault when I came home. Thus I used to come home early, and was glad to get off to bed as soon as possible.

My father wasn't a duffer, but he was dogmatic in his opinions, and didn't have the least respect for what I had learnt at school. He had a nasty habit also of correcting me before people, when I was merely giving them some information ; this habit of his used to make my very blood boil with rage and wounded pride. I think if fathers showed a little more respect for their sons there wouldn't be so much discontent in houses. To be shut up every time one opens his mouth is very hurtful to a boy's feelings.

Of course, you must understand that I am writing now about the feelings and ideas I had at twelve years of age, while I was still at school. When I say that I did not admire my father, it was not through any change on his part so much as from a kind of development in myself.

I was reckoned a smart boy by the School Board teacher, and had qualified for the seventh standard. When the summer holidays were over, I was to be

put into the highest standard in the Board School, and then I could leave when I liked.

My name is Tom Prince, and my father was an artist by profession. We lived in Clapham at this time, on the Common, but as my father had travelled a great deal, and was of a restless disposition, we shifted about pretty frequently.

It cost a good deal to wander about in this gipsy fashion. If we had boldly gone in for a caravan, it would have been much more economical, and just about as respectable as we lived. We were never long away from dear old Clapham, no matter how often we took to country cottages. Father thought he would like the country, and at times took a great disgust to city people, as represented by Clapham society, so we moved from a town house into a country cottage.

Three months of country ways generally satisfied our father that it was better to endure the evils of the city than fly to others that town people knew not of. As for me, I had grown up, fighting for my father's position and the dignity of the family, until I was almost a professional with my fists.

I enjoy reading books fairly well, when one must stay indoors. At such times I can get through a lot of books, with a glance at the beginnings and ends, and a scamper through the centre. It is wonderful what a lot one can read if one misses all the wretched descriptions and stupid conversations, looking out only for incident.

Now, I bet any one, two to two, that out of a swarm of books written nowadays you won't find more than half-a-dozen incidents in each book,

and where you do find them, they are so ancient and weak that you don't need to read more than a line to recognise the old—old device.

It is like resurrecting a pantomimic old man and making him sport once more round the columbine with his stale tricks.

When I was twelve, I considered myself to be a very original and clever fellow, a *fin de siècle* sort of a youth, as most schoolboys do. Looking back now to that time I am disposed to excuse my father for a great deal of his good-humoured mockery at my cheek; but at the time I felt myself very much ill-used, and for a long time meditated on punishing him by running away.

It was Billy Cane, my chum, who put the idea first into my head. Billy Cane was in the same standard as I was. He was a year older than me, and half a head taller, but he wasn't very smart. That is why we got on so well together, perhaps. It was not often he had any ideas to give away, but he was very obliging and ready to adopt ideas when they were given to him, and he always did what I told him and stuck up for me, as a chum should do.

Billy Cane no more liked staying indoors than I did. Football, cricket, rounders and swimming were more in our line than sitting in the house like a girl.

But Billy had a very strict father, who belonged to the old school of brutal and bigoted parents, who believe in not spoiling the child by sparing the rod. There was a standing order in that establishment that Billy had to come

straight home from school, without lingering by the way.

When Billy got home, he was kept a close prisoner until the next morning, when he was sent again to school, unless there chanced to be any errands for him to do. When there was a message, he was given a certain time to do it, which, if he exceeded, he was promptly punished.

His father was coachman to a very crotchety old lady, so that he had a good stock of whips always handy for the use of Billy as well as for the horses.

It was a miserable life my chum led at home, and I daresay was a good deal harder to put up with than mine. Yet it had its pleasures and excitements also, which mine had not.

When Billy was out he made the most of his hour of liberty, and enjoyed himself thoroughly, although he knew well there was no escape from that daily walloping. He was quite an adept at making up excuses to account for the freedom he had stolen. Being threatened also with dire punishment if he ever took to smoking, Billy kept a pipe hidden in the hayloft, and expended most of his halfpennies in tobacco and cigarettes.

Now, I had no inducement to steal out of the house and lose my sleep as Billy had. If I had wanted to smoke I might have used my father's tobacco, while he would only have said, 'I don't think I'd do that sort of thing yet, Tom, if I were you!' Billy hated the chapel and Sunday school, because he was ordered to attend these, and thrashed if he played truant. He likewise

borrowed all my *Deadwood Dicks* and devoured them greedily, because his father burnt such literature whenever he found them.

I daresay Mr Cane thought he was doing his duty in treating Billy in this way—searching his pockets each time he came home, and not believing a word he said. He, no doubt, considered that he was bringing his son up properly when he forbade him every kind of amusement that a boy likes. He was a very religious man, was Mr Cane, and used to preach sometimes at street corners, making Billy blush for his ignorance when his schoolmates heard his father ruthlessly mutilating his native language. It is hard lines on a poor boy, who has been forced to learn grammar, to have to listen to a father exposing his own shortcomings before the public. It is hard also for a lad who would naturally prefer telling the truth to have to make up lies, all because an ignorant and narrow-minded parent will seek to curtail the healthy promptings of Nature.

Billy was a plucky boy, if a bit slow, and loved outdoor exercise with all his heart. When we were playing, he never thought about his pipe. It was only after he had been thrashed that he retired sulking to the hayloft and fossicked about for his forbidden pipe and tobacco.

Also, many a time he had to fight for his father, and tell a lie about it afterwards. Some boy would jeer at his father's ignorance, then Billy would go for that boy with his fists. It isn't in human nature for a son to hear his father mocked

at and not put up his hands. He got the horse-whip for this also, and bore it without telling why he had fought.

We both went to the same school, and lived near each other, so it was natural that we should walk home together and talk over things.

Now, before we broke up for the holidays, Billy said to me one afternoon,—

‘See here, Tom, I’m not going to stand much more of these thrashings and keepings in; I’m going to make a bolt of it and get a ship!’

We had both been reading a lot of sea stories, and there seemed no life so jolly as that of a sailor. My dad, besides, had been extra sarcastic and taking down on me lately before his visitors, so that I felt bitter and revengeful, therefore I answered,—

‘See here, Billy, if you are going to run away, I’ll go with you; but where will we go to get a ship?’

‘Oh, the India Docks might do; but I’ve got an Aunt at Gravesend, who will put us up while we look about. There are lots of ships down there!’

We talked it over and planned it all out. Billy had saved up sixpence, and I had fivepence and might raise another penny from my sister, so that we could be equal.

With one shilling we could easily manage, we thought, as so many boys had done before. We would sneak out early some morning and have a long summer day to do our tramp. If we grew hungry, we could buy a loaf of bread. A loaf of bread would last us two days—that is, fivepence for two days.

Boys don't need anything more than bread when they are catering for themselves. Of course, when they are at home they grumble if they have not butter and tea, and all the other sundries to pick and choose from, but that is because they are dependants; when they strike out and become free and independent, then dry bread, if it isn't too stale, is quite sufficient for their necessities.

Billy got an extra severe thrashing the night before we started, for some imaginary crime, and that hardened and braced him up for the endeavour.

But I had not the same pleasure in running away. My father was never a man one could depend upon. On the night before the morning I had pledged myself to go he took us to the theatre, and didn't give me a single excuse for being sulky with him. He was so nice and agreeable, and listened so attentively to my remarks on the acting—indeed, he flattered my critical judgment so much that, when I said 'good-night,' I went to bed feeling like a traitor and a skunk.

What a night I passed thinking I would never see any of them again—my big sister, so clever and good; my little sister, who loved me so much; my brother, who did pretty well everything I ordered him to do; and my dad, who wasn't so bad a sort when compared with Mr Cane, or a hundred other fathers.

How I wished I could put off that runaway engagement. Never had my bed seemed so comfortable, or the house so homely.

I had no mother, but my big sister looked after us like a mother. Father also was fond of cooking, and used to cook us some tasty dishes.

To-morrow all that would be past for ever. Susan, our servant, would miss me; so would they all. At the thought of how much I would be missed, I fairly groaned with wretchedness and wet my pillow with pitiful tears. Ah! if Billy would only propose to put it off for a bit, all might yet be well.

My father was a late riser, and generally got his breakfast in bed, while the rest of us had ours downstairs. I felt glad not to have to face dad on that last morning. I had not the courage either to borrow the penny from my sister, so that when I left the house I was that coin short.

Billy Cane was waiting for me, with stern resolution in his eye, at the corner, when I got out. He had no tender nor mournful memories to take his courage away. His father had whipped him the night before so severely that his skin still smarted, while his mother had boxed his ears that morning, so that they were like red blotting-paper. Billy was starting the journey with the savage feelings of a revengeful Apache, while I was squirming like an ungrateful sneak.

We struck across by Acre Lane, through Brixton, and then by the most direct streets towards London Bridge.

Along, as close to the river as we could, we trudged on through the East-end of London,

until we had left the busy traffic and got into mud flats and hedges.

It was a hot day, and we were tired before we got half-way down. People were very kind, however, and believing Billy's story that we were going to his aunt's, they showed us the right road. One shopkeeper gave us half a loaf and some cheese without charging us anything; another woman gave us a bottle of ginger-beer and some greengages, besides asking us in to rest when she saw how tired we were.

It was Billy who made the first proposal that we should go back, but as he did not do this before the afternoon I would not give in then. We were so close to our destination that I resolved to go on.

Poor Billy, he had soft feet, for with his father keeping him so much at home he didn't have the exercise I had, therefore he was much sooner knocked up. As he dragged along after me now, with his feet all swollen and blistered, he began to look upon his father's whip as a mild punishment compared to what he was now enduring. 'Oh, Tom! I can go no farther,' he moaned, as he flung himself down by the wayside.

'Bear up, Billy,' I cried. 'We are almost there; another half mile and we'll be at the docks.'

It was close on evening when we reached Gravesend, tired out, hot, hungry, and as nearly repentant as two runaways could well be.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD ISN'T QUITE WHAT YOUNG BIRDS FANCY IT

THINGS are very different now than they were when our fathers were boys. Then lads could get a job easily, but now a lot of influence is required to get even a place in the forecastle. My father has told us that when he was a boy he ran away from home three or four times, and could have got a ship quite easily, only that the police always caught him and brought him back again before he could sail away.

Billy Cane and I found out how useless our running away had been, as far as ships or steamers were concerned, before we had half-an-hour at Gravesend.

We reached there about six o'clock, having been nearly ten hours on the journey, and were mighty sick of walking by that time.

Billy wanted to go to his aunt's straight away, and have a rest and some tea, but I said 'No ; let's try the ships first, in case we may miss a chance if we put off any more time.'

It was a weary and very discouraging thing to

go from one ship to another and get the same reply.

‘Want a boy, sir?’

‘No; we can get lots of boys, and be paid a good premium for taking them also. Be off with you, back home.’

After rough treatment of this sort, I began to think, that although boys are ever so much cleverer than they used to be, judging from the men former boys have grown into, yet they are not valued at the same rate.

If my father could have got a ship easily when he was a boy, some thirty-five years ago, they must have been scarce then, or else the captains were much kinder men than they are now.

When I mentioned this change to Billy, after we had tried vainly half-a-dozen ships, he snorted disdainfully, and answered,—

‘Don’t you believe that dad of yours any more than I believe mine. These old men are just the most awful bouncers going, and stick at nothing in the way of whackers as to what they could do when they were boys. They do this because they know we dare not contradict them, and couldn’t if we dared. Look here, Tom, if your father could have got a ship as easy as he says, how is it that he ain’t a captain or an admiral now, eh?’

I hadn’t thought about this before, but, now it was advanced, I could see the reasonableness of it. Yes, Billy was right. Fathers, when relating their youthful adventures, don’t always stick to the plain unvarnished. Perhaps they forget what really happened, and get the facts mixed up with

romances they have read. That is how they were never defeated in battle; always found the thing they wanted so easily; were such handsome and brave young heroes, and were such irresistible fascinator—in their young days. It is easy to have been anything one likes *thirty years ago*, when there is no one alive who could remember what you were then.

Yes, Billy was right. If my father or his could have got so easily to sea when they were young, why were they not captains or admirals now, instead of being only a common coachman and an ordinary artist? No sensible man, surely, would prefer dry land to the free and bounding ocean if he could have had his choice.

The last ship we tried we got worse treated than at any of the others. That finished us up, as far as trying our luck went, with sea captains.

This captain must have been drinking hard, for he had bloodshot, bulging-out eyes, and a face like a red-hot fire.

He glared at us both like a demon as we made our request, and then, without a word, he jumped at us like a savage and pinned us up against the bulwarks.

Then, as we both stood shivering before him, he plunged his hands into our pockets, turning out everything we had and pitching them on the deck.

Billy's pipe and tobacco he smashed under his heavy heel; in fact, if we had been two thieves he could not have treated us in a more dastardly and ignoble fashion.

From my pocket he fished out the last number

of the Adventure Library of pure, healthy literature for the house. The title of this complete story was *Pierre Palo, the Pirate*, which, as I had not yet read it, I could not criticise.

This red-faced, fiendish captain, who looked and acted as like a pirate as he well could, opened the novelette with a grin of hateful contempt on his thick lips.

'So this is the sort of rubbish you read, is it, my lads?' he shouted at us. "'*Spirited as it is wholesome*," is it? "Founded to counteract the pernicious influence of the 'penny dreadful.'" "Cheap but not trashy.'" He was reading some of the approving notices from clergymen and newspapers, and grunting like a pig while he read. 'This is what put it into your heads to try the sea as an occupation. Do you want to be pirates, and go in for gold dust and doubloons, eh?'

'No, sir; we want to be honest sailors,' I answered as boldly as I could. I did not like the look of his eyes as he fixed them on us. He looked dangerous, and I just wished he would let us go free. As for poor Billy, he was like chalk with fatigue, hunger and mortal terror.

'Ho! ho! Honest sailors, and, perhaps, in time become honest captains like me—pure, wholesome, healthy, spirited and high-class sailors and captains, as this kind of literature is, eh?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then, come. I'll do my best to put you on the right lay for what you want.'

He seized us by the arms, and marching us over the ship's side, took us straight to where a

couple of policemen were standing at the wharf gates.

'See here, policemen, here's a couple of boys who have bolted from home because they want to be pure, wholesome pirates like Pierre Palo. I haven't the least doubt but they have robbed their father or someone else's till, perhaps a bank, for I found tenpence in their pockets, a pipe with some shag, and this high-class romance. You had best look after them, and see there is nothing dangerous about them, like dynamite. They look bad eggs!'

I was glad afterwards to learn that this wretched and bloated creature was not a captain at all, in spite of his peaked cap and brass buttons, but only a ship's caretaker. I shouldn't have liked to remember him as a captain.

He had got us both into a bad mess, however, as the stupid owls of policemen persisted in regarding us as anarchists and conspirators, who had come to work havoc on the river. They knocked us about dreadfully as they searched us for infernal machines, and were going to take us off to prison, only that we bribed them to let us off with my fourpence and Billy's sixpence, throwing in *Pierre Palo, the Pirate*, as an extra inducement.

With a sound kick each from their large and heavy boots, that lifted us both several feet in the air, and resounding cuffs on our ears from their large and heavy hands, that sent us staggering through the gates, they let us go at last.

We were warned to march straight back again

to London, and threatened that if we showed up again near the ships no inducement nor bribe would make them forget their duty a second time. Alas! we had nothing left now to bribe even the smallest boy, far less burly ruffians like them, so we were glad to slink away.

It was strictly necessary for us now to visit the aunt of Billy, as we were both starving and had nowhere else to go. Our escapade began to assume a different complexion to what it had done even an hour ago.

We were suspected of being dangerous criminals, over twenty-four miles from Clapham, and stony broke.

The sea was barred against us by those blue-coated dragons; in fact, to linger in or about Gravesend was to invite arrest and the degradation of a prison cell, with perhaps penal servitude in the near future. At home they must have missed us before this time and, possibly, had already given to the different police stations our names and descriptions. Tom Prince, a black-eyed, dark-complexioned boy of twelve; dressed in a worn tweed suit, about an inch short in the arms and legs. Billy Cane, thirteen; pasty-faced, with watery-blue eyes and straw-tinted hair, with a big brown patch on the left knee of his navy blue serge trousers, and an old coachman's coat made into a jacket by his careful mother.

That old coachman's coat and the brown patch on the left knee would give us away anywhere, as soon as the police proclamation was out. There was no help for it. We must prepare ourselves to

face that long journey back as soon as possible and get to Chapham before people were up. Our expedition had failed, as Napoleon's did when he took his army to Moscow, and, like him, the quicker we made tracks the better for our skins.

The coachman's heaviest whip loomed in the distance for Billy; what was looming for me I could only speculate about with a vague horror. My father had not thrashed me often in my life, but when he did they were proper ones. I had never disgraced him as I had done this time by making him set the police on my track. I felt sure he must do this before morning, and I felt, likewise, as confident that my punishment would not be light.

'Well, Billy, what are you going to say to your aunt to account for the unexpected pleasure of seeing you?'

'I'll tell her father heard she was ill and sent me down to inquire after her health.'

'That's not so bad. And what are you going to tell your father when you get back?'

'Oh!' Billy groaned heavily, and shivered as he limped alongside of me.

'I'll tell you what I'll say,' I continued. 'When I get home, I'll tell them I wanted a long walk and forgot the time and distance.'

'And will they swallow that?'

'No one could dispute that we have had a long walk by the time we get home.'

'Yes, that's true enough, if we ever do get back. I think I'll die though on the road.'

'Nonsense, Billy; soldiers think nothing about a march like this.'

'People with soft feet aren't taken on as soldiers, I've heard,' moaned Billy, wearily.

'Well, let's get to your aunt; she may lend us some money to pay our train back.'

'I think not, and so would you if you knew Aunt Primrose.'

'Well, surely she'll give us something to eat and drink, to brace us up for the journey?'

'Perhaps. If she's that way inclined.' Billy was in a most dejected and forlorn mood and could think of nothing hopeful.

Indeed, I was not in a much more lively condition. The stories in which we had read about boys running away, and being cheerful and happy afterwards, seemed to be ghastly lies, concocted only to delude boys into playing the fool. The world wasn't at all the hospitable place which those liars described it as being, neither was it an oyster that any boy could open with his own pocket-knife. If it was an oyster, it took a good many wedges to press it open. If there were billets to be got, either on sea or land, the boy must have a father, or some friends, to push him into them.

We had been a pair of fools in trusting to the pure and wholesome literature of these high-class libraries of adventure. I daresay Billy thought as I did, while we limped sadly along the streets of Gravesend in search of Mrs Primrose's lodging-house.

I was glad, however, that my friend Billy did not reproach me with being the cause of the

present disasters. He might have done so with some show of reason, as I lent him the books, and put the first notions of being a sailor into his head. He said nothing about that, but went on painfully, looking at the numbers of the different houses. At last he stopped and said with a feeble whisper,—

‘That’s where Aunt Primrose lives!’

It was a good-sized house, with the most immaculate of white-starched muslin curtains draping the windows, which were dustless and transparently polished. Aunt Primrose believed in cleanliness at anyrate, as far as the outside appearances of her premises were concerned. My heart sunk a little at the sight of that starchy whiteness. We were dusty and disreputable-looking visitors, therefore out of harmony with all that stiff respectability. I trembled at the probable reception of wanderers such as we were.

‘You knock,’ murmured Billy, timidly drawing back as far as he could behind me.

I lifted the knocker, and made it clatter against the knob in the most West Kensington, fashionable or postman-like peel that I could command, tired out and tremulous as I was.

‘Oh, lor!’ cried Billy, starting at the din I made, and moving as if he’d run away.

‘What’s the matter, Billy?’

‘You’ve gone and done it this time, Tom.’

‘How?’

‘Knocking as if you were a telegraph boy, or a postman with a registered letter.’

‘What of that? It’s a fashionable knock.’

‘Yes, and that’s just why we are likely to suffer

when she comes along. My aunt is a Cornish woman, and hates aristocrats like poison. She'd enjoy making a swell wait at her door half a day, and insult him when she did come. You wait and see.'

Five minutes passed, and still we lingered by the door, without a sound coming from the inside. At last, tired out, I once again seized hold of the knocker. 'Do it softly this time, Tom, if you want us to get any grub to-night,' cried Billy, imploringly, as he gripped me by the arm.

I struck one clear knock, and was going to repeat it, when suddenly I heard a sound from within, as of a chair being pushed back in some far distant region. This was followed by the rising of a heavy body, and a strange shambling along the lobby, as if a three-legged giant was hobbling along.

'That's my Aunt Primrose,' whispered Billy, drawing modestly back.

Slowly the Manx-like tread advanced, a stump, a shamble and a most aggressive tramp.

I stood on the defensive outside that door, equally prepared to smile ingratiatingly—for I was brooding on the coming supper, and prepared to sink dignity to secure it—likewise to duck my head, if this Cornish democrat had a broom stick in her hand and was likely to use it, as female democrats sometimes use broom handles.

I never yet had any cause to consider supper as I considered it just then outside that front door. It was a revelation to me in the matter of appetite: what one may sacrifice in order to appease it.

Hitherto I had despised Esau as the most weak-minded of men for selling his birthright for a mess of pottage. I was inclined to understand and pity Esau that evening. I have often pitied him since.

At last the door opened and Mrs Deborah Primrose stood before us, looking like an implacable judge facing two trembling felons.

She was a solidly-built and deliberate woman in her motions. When she had opened the door she barred the doorway with her bulky body, and transfixed us both with a pair of brooding black eyes from under a beetling brow, surmounted with outstanding tufts of black hair.

Her complexion was dark. Much more gipsy-like and swarthy than mine, and her expression was morose and forbidding in the extreme.

But I had no need to duck my head, for she did not lift her stick. She leaned on it instead, while her bead-like, brooding eyes moved over us both.

'Well, young men, and what do you want, trying to break down my knocker?'

'Please, aunt, I'm your nephew, Billy Cane,' he said from my back.

'Yas, I see some resemblance to that weak-kneed sister o' mine in the face back there; but who are you, young man, standing in front of the other?'

'I'm Billy's friend, please you, Mrs Primrose,' I replied in a cheerful voice.

'And what may ye want, Billy's friend, a-knocking of the house down?'

'Nothing, except to ask how you are, Mrs Primrose.'

I wanted my supper badly, and I was determined to get it if sneaking diplomacy could get it for me. I had never tried diplomacy in my life before, yet, somehow, it seemed to come to me naturally when I needed it most.

I threw back my head and looked at this female ogre with my most jaunty air, and said airily,—

‘Billy has been telling me about his independent aunt so much that I wanted to know her, therefore I persuaded him to bring me down to Gravesend. We have walked all the way, and feel jolly tired, and the worst of it is that neither of our fathers know we have come, so there will be a big row and no mistake.’

A grim smile bared Mrs Primrose’s toothless gums, then she said, moving her body to one side,—

‘You can come in, young men.’

CHAPTER III

WE RETURN SADLY

BILLY CANE either did not do his Aunt Deborah Primrose justice in his pessimistic description of her, or else she was in an extra genial mood that evening. She was grim, certainly, and could, I daresay, be awful if contradicted or roused in any way, for she was a dogmatic woman, who had been in many parts of the world, and experienced a good deal of life.

‘It may be that my free-and-easy manner of accosting her won her heart, or the idea that Billy had broken loose from the harsh parental control pleased her more than she cared to show. The main thing for us was that she made us welcome to her kitchen, and gave us a good feed of pea soup, which she was engaged in making at the time.

It was glorious pea soup; at least I thought so, as I tucked into five or six plates of it. At home, I never took kindly to soups of any sort, and, I think, disliked pea soup most. Perhaps it was that that night Mrs Primrose made it differently, or our long fast and rough lines made me less fastidious, but I did enjoy that feed, I can tell you.

While we were eating, the old lady watched us both attentively as she sat at the fireside, with a cup in one hand to ladle out the soup, and the other hand rubbing her rheumaticy keee.

She did not ask us any questions at all, and it was only when Billy started to give his reasons for coming that she opened her mouth.

'Now, young man'—she said 'young man' with a firm depth of accent that made one wish she wouldn't—'young man, ye needn't trouble yourself making up any lies, or think you can bamboozle me. I have had too much experience of boys, an' men, too, for to be bamboozled by the smartest fool among them. I know all about it. That canting humbug of a father of yours has been extra hard on you, so you have runned away.'

'How do you know that?' we both asked, giving ourselves away in our surprise at her knowledge of our affairs.

'How does I know? Because I am a witch, maybe.'

She certainly had some of the outward characteristics of the witch tribe. She was ugly, and had a skin like tanned hides; her eyes were black and glittering, and as she sat bending over towards the pot her black cat had perched himself on her shoulders, and was watching us with round, yellow eyes. There was, besides, a tame raven hopping about the floor, and, in a big cage, a vicious-looking cockatoo sat on his bar, and filled out the gaps of conversation with most untimely and embarrassing remarks.

'Maybe this yer cat gives me some information about things as goes on at a distance, and what he forgets to notice Jack, the raven there, picks up. I suppose you've never seen a black cat like this about your gardens at night, have ye?'

We both had to own that we had seen dozens of strange cats of every shade prowling about the back gardens.

Mrs Primrose nodded mysteriously. 'That's maybe where some of my news come from. Cats tell each other all that goes on in their different lodging-houses. And did ye never see the ravens on Clapham Common?'

Yes, we had seen them also, and heard them likewise, making about as much noise over their conversations as the cats did at nights.

'Ravens and crows can look into the windows and down the chimneys, and that is how they come to be so knowing, for they both see and hear things that the cats sometimes miss through their fondness for night-air exercise. Now, the ravens, crows and jackdaws are cousins to each other, and they don't forget their relations as some Christians do. Likewise, as none of the birds or beasts ever tried to build a Tower of Babel, they all speaks and understands one language, for they had no confusion of tongues among them. Well, what my Tom and my Jack finds out they brings home and tells the cockatoo there, who, as he has been learned English, translates it all over for my instruction while I sit here waiting on your uncle coming home.'

'You can take your blooming oath about that,'

here shrieked the cockatoo, as this fearsome old woman paused to gather her breath. She smiled grimly and continued,—

‘Maybe I don’t need the services of them animals, seeing as how I has eyes in my head, and the ways of a husband to find out. Maybe the lodgers I keeps are more than enough to educate a poor woman in the habits and excuses of boys and men, without having the extra advantage of having a husband who can’t tell the truth about anything, no matter how hard he was to try. Take it all round, Billy Cane, and you, young man, I knows that you both runned away from your homes this morning, and that you has got to trudge back again as quick as you can.’

Yes, wherever she had got her information, the facts were sure.

‘It is now close on eight o’clock, and there’s a train leaves here soon for London, which might take you up just in time so that you may reach home afore they go to bed.’

Billy and I looked at her expectantly as she paused and seemed to meditate. Her next words shattered our budding hopes.

‘But I guess you has no money, otherwise you wouldn’t have thought of coming to see your Aunt Primrose.’

Our faces told her that as we sank back on our chairs.

‘And, as your uncle is out of work just now, and my lodgers back in their payments, I has no money either, otherwise I shouldn’t be making pea soup from an old ham bone for your uncle

when *he* comes back. So, young men, as you walked down, you must just walk back again, for there's no work to be got at Gravesend just now. The sugar is done, the tea-caddy empty, and this is the last of the butter.'

She rose, painfully from her seat and placed a half-loaf, and about two ounces of butter in a plate, on the table. She spoke quietly and firmly, yet sternly. The bitterness increased as she went on.

'You thought to be taken on as sailor boys, I know, and I've seen the time when you could have had your desires, but not now, and not these ten years past. Sailors have to pay now for the privilege of eating three-year-old salt horse and measly biscuits. There ain't enough work now for half of the boys and gals as is born, and the competition is too keen, even in the most unhealthy occupations.'

'Knock the blooming lot of 'em on the 'eads,' again shrieked the cockatoo, as he swung himself madly, head downwards. We both started and looked at that demon bird with awesome horror, as the old woman went on with dreary bitterness.

'Listen to him; he knows as much as Gladstone, and is about as wise.'

'A blooming ass. Stuff his jaw wi' a hot potato,' yelled this vulgar bird furiously, while his mistress continued,—

'It's Primrose teaches him them things; he's always after—'

'Cockles and mussels alive, alive, O !'

sang the cockatoo, as he swung himself upright on

his bar. Then he looked solemnly at the cat, and added, 'Apple tarts, jam tarts, bring 'em along, hot and tasty.' After these irrelevant remarks this low-bred exile from Australia prepared himself for a snooze.

'Yes,' said Mrs Primrose, 'he is never far out, that ere cockatoo. As I have told you, young men, our cupboard is like that of Mother Hubbard's, and when my 'usband comes home, which won't be afore the public-houses close, he won't bring more nor a big appetite, the smell of cloves on his breath, a lot of oily excuses, and a pair of glassy-looking eyes; therefore, there's no good waiting for him, unless a comic song is any good to you. They call him a comic fellow outside, and say I look like his mother, even though he is five years older nor me. Well, so I does, perhaps, and so I well may do, seeing as how all the cares of married life falls on me.'

Mrs Primrose was rubbing her knee hard now, and looking at the fire with sombre eyes, seeing which we both rose and grasped our caps.

'Yes, you had best go straight back home, young men, and don't waste no more time about it. It's a long way, but you have young legs, and I've done that distance often when I was a gal down in Cornwall. I'll put up some bread to carry you along, and if you make haste you'll get home afore anyone is up. Tell your dad and mam, Billy, that you came to see me, and that you have seen me; likewise that I am well and doing remarkably well; also that Primrose wears about the same as ever, having a young heart and a cheerful disposition

as nothing can keep under. And say, besides, to your father from me, that he had better let you off this time, and slacken the reins a bit when he's a-driving of boys. But I'll come and have a talk with him afore long.'

She cut us several slices of bread, and spread all the butter she had upon them, then, wrapping these in paper, she showed us the way out, and with a grim 'Good-night, young men,' she shut the door upon us and shambled back to her kitchen.

We both felt fresher and more hopeful now after our supper and rest, and as it was not yet quite dark we began our march out of Gravesend with good courage.

We would tell as much of the truth as was expedient when we got back. Own up where we had been and what we had seen, express our penitence at causing any uneasiness to our people, and bear what punishment was bestowed upon us as bravely as we could.

There would be no use in telling our original intentions, now that they had failed. Neither would we mention our capture by the police if we could avoid it. Our offence was bad enough—staying out a whole day and night—that it might have been worse, we resolved to keep to ourselves.

As we were leaving Gravesend, we passed a small beer-shop and heard, through the open window of the parlour, the sound of singing.

Billy stopped me by saying, 'That is my Uncle Primrose's voice ; let us listen for a minute.'

Creeping close to the window, we peeped through the curtain, and saw the youthful-looking uncle of

Billy entertaining a company of choice souls, and working in a music-hall fashion for his liquids. He was a thin, boyish-looking man, with light hair and mangy moustache, who at first sight might have passed for being under thirty. Billy told me his real age was fifty-six.

A rosy pinkness tinted his pole-parrot nose and thin eyelids, while his little blue eyes looked watery and fishy in their expression.

He was singing an ancient music-hall comic ditty, which required a good deal of rapid action to give it point. His voice, thin and high-pitched, gave one the first hint as to his actual age. Then I saw his neck as he jerked his head about, with furrows in it like those of a lean terrier dog, and next his hands, all wrinkled at the backs. In spite of his agility and the youthful innocence of his face, I knew that Billy was right as to his uncle's age.

He was a great favourite with the company who were paying for his drinks, and he kept them all in roars of laughter at his droll stories and comic antics. We had to laugh also as we listened outside while he sang a couple of songs and told several funny tales.

Then we came away and began to step out in earnest. Billy was rather proud about his uncle's social abilities, and told me that everyone who knew him liked him, except his father and Aunt Primrose.

I could not help wondering, as we walked along, how it was that such a gay fellow as Mr Primrose ever could have married such a grim and forbid-

ding-looking woman as Mrs Primrose. Perhaps, though, she wasn't grim when he first married her. Perhaps his everlasting high spirits and comic ways made her grow grim in time. I had felt the same way once about a musical box that I had. I liked its merry tinkle at first, then after a time I grew to hate it so greatly that I was forced to swap it with another boy for an old watch that didn't go. The watch that couldn't go seemed, somehow, to be better company than the musical box that wouldn't stop before it had finished all its tunes.

I wondered also if many cats or ravens were about while Mr Primrose entertained his friends. There was one cat on the hearthrug that seemed fast asleep, but I noticed that he twitched both his ears and his tail in a suspicious way every now and again. Perhaps he was there as a friend of Tom and the cats of the other husbands and fathers who were spending their wages, while their wives were brooding at home about how the rent was to be raised and the tea-caddies replenished. For a long time I walked on thinking over these things, and wondering if many people found life as they expected it to be at the start.

By-and-by the moon rose and made the road before us quite plain. I was getting used to the walking, and as Billy had taken off his boots and was trudging along with only his socks on, he was able to keep up with me pretty well.

We had the road nearly all the way to ourselves, and the night was comfortable and fine. We lay down and rested when we felt too tired to go on,

and although I had a job to get Billy up again after these rests, yet we managed to get the length of Woolwich as the clock was striking two.

Outside of Woolwich we were chased by a man for a good way, but as he was drunk we managed to get out of sight of him, tired as we were, after a bit of a run. Billy, however, was almost done up with that spurt, so that I had to sit down beside him for more than half-an-hour before I could get him up again. While we waited we ate the slices of buttered bread Mrs Primrose had given us, and after that we hobbled on once more.

It was a dreadful walk the last nine miles, and I thought we would never be able to accomplish it. My feet felt like lumps of lead and my joints all were aching horribly. As for poor Billy, I had now to drag him along most of the time, and help him up every few minutes when he fell. We were both dog-tired, and could hardly keep our eyes open. All we wanted was to lie down anywhere and go to sleep.

We kept on, however, through Greenwich, Peckham and Camberwell, then along by Coldharbour and Acre Lanes, and just as the clocks were striking six we reached old Clapham.

I went with Billy to his gate when, as he knew, his father would be up. He knocked, while I hid behind a tree on the common to see how he would get on.

'I expect I'll catch it, and I don't care. If father will only lay on to me now I won't feel it. I'm so tired out and sleepy that I wouldn't care if a 'bus ran over me. I hope he won't put off my thrashing!'

His wishes were granted. He had no time to knock twice at the gate before his father rushed out with his heaviest whip in his hand, and a face like a boiled beetroot. I heard afterwards that he had been up all night on the look-out for his son. Yes, Billy got it promptly, and without having to linger in suspense. I saw the beginning of that hiding, and didn't care to see the end.

How that whip bizzed and curled about Billy, as the father rushed at him and drove him inside! Talk of the savage knoutings of Russia, and the poor victims of Tartar tyranny—old Cane could have made a princely income as a flagellator anywhere!

Billy showed his gameness by not crying out while he was outside. If, afterwards, when the gate was shut upon them, he let out the most ear-piercing of yells, I knew that was merely business on his part. The boy is a blank fool who tries to play the silent Spartan with a father. To shriek his loudest, even before he is hit, is the policy of a wise child when with his irate parent.

And Billy showed himself no fool on that balmy summer morning. If ever cat or boy raised echoes in Clapham Common, Billy was the boy.

Listening to those blood-curdling yells, I left my hiding-place and went gravely towards my own home. I walked slowly and I thought sadly, for I was meditating upon my own approaching fate.

CHAPTER IV

A PHILOSOPHIC FATHER

I WAS very greatly relieved not to find anyone sitting up for me when I got home. Perhaps it would have been more flattering to my importance if my father had been waiting for me inside the door. I half expected some sort of a reception as I slid my latch key into the hole as noiselessly as I could, and pushed open the front door.

On the whole, however, I was much better pleased to find myself the only occupant of the ground floor for the present. Knowing my dad's hasty temperament from a long experience, I felt in no great hurry to interview him until I had found out what mood he was in on his waking.

Billy Cane's father was a consistent character; that is, he was always in the mood for walloping Billy on the smallest pretence. It was his duty, and he seemed to find a great pleasure in doing his duty towards his son and heir.

Now, my dad was not always to be depended upon in this way. If the injury was fresh, and he had been irritated by some other thing as well, then the whacking was as sure to come as rain in November. By keeping out of his way, however, until his wrath had time to cool, I found that

he often forgot all about my offence, or if he did remember it, he would dismiss it with a warning.

My present policy was, like Brer Rabbit, to lie low, and find out from my sister or brother, when they got up, how my absence had been taken.

There were no signs of anyone getting up yet, so I just took off my boots at the door mat, and, closing the door, as a burglar might do, I crept stealthily into the back kitchen.

Here I took off my jacket and vest, and pouring some water gently into a basin, enjoyed a good wash, and after that bathed my feet, which were all swollen, burning and blistered, and that made me more ready to face my destiny.

I was just drying my feet when I heard someone coming down the stairs. As I had no chance of getting outside, I made tracks for the back of the scullery door and hid there, with the dish towel between me and the approaching enemy.

If it was our servant, Susan, she was sure to yell out and raise the whole house before I could stop her. I might have known, however, that Susan could not possibly be the first up in our household. If she was that morning, then it would have been phenomenal, as Susan had never before come down before her breakfast was ready.

I might have known, if I hadn't been in such a scare, that it would be my plucky sister José—the one who was always the last to go to bed and the first to rise.

That girl was a wonder. She ought to have been a boy, for nothing could startle her nerves or make her utter a cry of surprise. She was sixteen

at this time, but had looked after us all, and was as game a chum as any boy could wish to have, only she was a girl, poor thing! which was her misfortune and not her fault.

She came straight into the scullery and stood looking at my legs and bare feet as if she had expected to see them there. I was hiding my head with the dish-towel, you see, like the ostrich, and had forgotten about my lower extremities.

I knew I was discovered when I looked at her face through a hole in the towel. It was so quiet and alert, and without a shade of fear. That sister of mine could have faced a charge of Zulus without blanching a shade. She cared no more for comforts than a redskin would, and was quite as ready to fall asleep on the floor as in a bed.

She saw two bare feet and rolled up trousers as far as the knees below that towel, but she couldn't all at once recognise to whom they belonged; for legs and feet don't give the same information as faces, and although I was only twelve, mine were pretty thumpers already. I knew from that perplexed puckering of her brow that she was just meditating making a clutch at me by the throat, and, as she was studying anatomy at the time in the drawing school, that she was just reckoning up the locality of my throat behind the towel before she made the tigress leap, therefore I cried out,—

—‘Whist! José,’ in my deepest whisper, as I flung the towel from my face.

She didn't budge an inch, although she must have been surprised. She only said quietly,—

‘Hallo! Tom. Got back?’

‘Yes, José!’

‘Well, where have you been? You and your friend Billy Cane have caused a nice kick up, I can tell you.’

I followed my sister to the kitchen, and while she lit the gas stove and put on the kettle I told her our adventures, not forgetting the whacking I had seen started on Billy.

‘Do you think I’m in for it, José?’ I asked after I had given her all the particulars.

‘Well, I don’t know. It all depends upon how father wakes up this morning. He was pretty cool about it yesterday. You see, he has run away himself, and has some experience in, and sympathy for, runaways.’

‘Billy’s mother came yesterday in a terrible state about her son. Her husband had raised her nerves with his ravings and forebodings, and she was sure that her Billy would be murdered. Father soothed her over and told her not to worry, for you would be both sure to come back again in a day or two at the most. He told her you would both make straight for the ships, but that no captain would take you; also, that as the weather was mild, a night or two outside amongst the fields wouldn’t hurt you in the least. She went away greatly comforted.’

I felt, as I listened to this, that my father knew a great deal more than I had given him credit for. It made me feel rather small; yet I wished he had told me a few of these difficulties before I started. I forgot at this moment that I had not thought of

asking his advice. I began to wish also that I could have stayed away for more than one day and night. My sister continued her story,—

‘At teatime Mr Cane came up and got very nearly kicked out. He began by abusing you as a very bad boy, and putting all the blame on you for leading his innocent Billy astray, and when father tried to reason with him he turned round and began to abuse father.’

‘It was Billy who first spoke about going,’ I said, as I knew I could trust José not to tell.

‘I daresay one was as bad as the other, and so father said; but when this vulgar coachman began to be nasty father took him properly in hand.

“What are you going to do, Mr Prince?” the coachman yelled.

“Nothing,” said our father. “The boys will come home all right, and this outing won’t hurt them one bit.”

“Have you no sense of dooty?”

“Yes; perhaps a good deal more than you possess, Mr Cane,” answered father, quietly.

“Ain’t you going to give their descriptions to the perlice, and set them on the track of them wicked youths?”

“No; I should be very sorry to trouble the police over such a matter.”

“Then, you are a heartless monster, sir.”

‘Father didn’t kick him out, as we all expected, he only took him by the arm and pushed him out gently, saying, “Take my advice, you stupid ass, and go to bed as I intend to do.”

“Then, you deserve to be ’anged for a hatheist

and 'eartless hanimal," he yelled out from the gate. "I am going to fulfil my dooty as a Christian, by putting the perlice on the track of my herring boy."

'And did he?' I asked huskily. How I abhorred the father of Billy Cane at this moment for bringing this disgrace upon us.

'I believe so,' answered José, laughing heartily. 'He came up about an hour afterwards, and when he could not get in—for father told me he'd have to smash him if he was tempted any more, so I didn't let him in—he stood at the door and read out from his note-book, so that the whole street might hear the composition which he had given to the police at Wandsworth Road. This it is as nearly as I can recollect,—

"Two boys missing from their 'appy 'omes—at least, from one 'appy 'ome. What the other is like, not at present known, so can't say.

"William Timothy Cane, boy from the 'appy 'ome, answering to the name of Billy. Age 13. Hexpression hinnocent and fair, with trusting blue eyes and hother hevidences of a mother's care, such as his father's coat made down, and his trousers respectably mended."

'I don't think that would find Billy,' I muttered. 'Go on, José!'

"Thomas Prince, boy from 'ome which is doubtful. Age 12. Black-eyed and beetle-browed, as nearly all criminals are. Expression most 'ang-dog and villainous. Dressed in old clothes that show no signs of a fond mother's care."

'I'm satisfied, José. Not even the smartest detective from Scotland Yard could have found me

from that description. Well, what did dad say to that?’

‘He laughed, and told Conrad to play the garden hose on the Salvationist coachman; then he continued his reading calmly till bedtime. I don’t think you’ll be thrashed for this, Tom,’ said José, a little maliciously.

‘What then?’ I asked dismally.

‘I think he’ll roast you instead with Mr Cane’s police description of you—the boy from the ‘ome which is doubtful.’

‘Oh, gracious! José, I hope not. Let me have a hiding like Billy and be done with it, but to be held up to scorn like this will be too, too cruel!’

By-and-by my little sister Ruth and Conrad got up, and as we were sitting down to breakfast lazy Susan sailed along, who would have liked to scream, only we gagged her. Depend upon those menials when you want a proper traitress, or traitor.

Presently, while we were still eating, dad’s bell sounded, and Susan, who never had stirred at such a signal before, all at once jumped up and said she’d take the tea up to master.

Conrad, however, was before her, and he carried up father’s breakfast, much to the disgust of Susan, who was only kept from accompanying my brother by José sternly ordering her to sit where she was.

When Conrad came back, I asked him eagerly how father was that morning, and what he had said.

‘Well,’ answered Conrad. ‘What dad first said was,—

"I suppose I shall have to get up and look after your stupid brother!"

'Oh!'

'Yes; and when I told him you were back, he said, quite gently,—

"Tell Tom to come up and speak to me at once."

'Oh!' once more, I groaned. I knew well what that gentle voice portended; yet there was no postponing the invitation. With a miserable feeling on me I prepared to obey.

When I reached the bedroom, I knocked respectfully at the door. I had not been always so respectful towards my genial dad, but there are moments when it is wise to study etiquette in these trivial items.

'Come in, Tom, my boy.'

It was a cheerful voice that invited me, and as I entered timidly I saw my dad sitting up in bed, with a book before him and his cup of tea on the little table: He looked me rapidly over, and then he said,—

'Got home all right, Tom?'

'Yes, father.'

'Had a good time?' He glanced at my blistered feet as he asked the questions, and I felt myself blushing horribly.

'Oh, yes, father. I took rather a long walk, and was rather late in coming back.'

'Been down to the ships, I see?'

Now, how could he see that? I answered more respectfully than I had ever done before,—

'Yes, sir.'

'That's all right. Want to be a sailor?'

'Yes, sir, if you please.'

'All right, my boy. I'll get you a ship and set you off properly when you are old enough. Get through the school first, and learn a little about navigation, though, for I want you to become an officer and a gentleman. There now, give me a kiss, old chap, and go down and have a good breakfast.'

Why did he not give me a hiding and be done with it, as Billy's ignorant beast of a father had done? When he asked me to give him a kiss, I felt as if my heart was going to burst.

I went up to him, however, and gave him what he asked for; then, with a howl, I rushed downstairs and knocked my head against the wall. Philosophic fathers are so awfully hard to get on with.

CHAPTER V

I GET MY SHIP

FOR the next two years things went on pretty smoothly, and without much incident or excitement.

I stuck at school as long as I could, until I had got through the ex-seventh, and then I left off cultivating my mind, and did what I could to cultivate my muscles by outdoor exercise. I also kept pretty constantly at my father, so that he might not forget his promise to get me a ship. If a boy wants anything out of his father, and can stand the risks, there's no surer way of getting it than by worrying and asking for it constantly. What you don't get out of affection, you are mostly sure to get for the sake of peace. The risks are—well, I needn't mention what they are to any healthy boy.

The same crowd of hard-up Bohemians came about us as always did when we were in town—journalists out of a job; actors, actresses and sub-editors, ditto. All the different branches of the arts and sciences were represented in our visitors, and all hard-up and wanting bills backed, or, failing that, the loan of what loose cash father had about him.

They never called when they were in work ; perhaps they were all too busy then. They never dreamt about paying back any of the money they had borrowed, and what we all noticed was that, when these needy sub-editors or journalists got on to a paper, they started to do father as much injury as they could with that paper. That is how they showed their gratitude and paid their debts in merry Bohemia.

They would come with their wives and children and pay us long visits ; in fact, they usually seemed to smell out when father had got a cheque, then they would come and keep us all lively as long as the money lasted. The ladies played themselves at cooking nice and extravagant dinners and suppers, and smoked cigarettes while they were looking after the firing of the pastry. The gentlemen lounged about, talking philosophy all the time they were awake, smoking like steam engines with father's tobacco, and drinking gallons of special Scotch whisky mixed with Schwepe's soda and seltzer, which father had to pay for. They all took their breakfasts in bed, and didn't often care for much of that before twelve or one o'clock.

While they were with us we were all right, for there was a glut of good things in which we had our share. It was after they had taken their leave that we also suffered periods of hard-upness, while dad was working like a slave to finish some more pictures or illustrations.

They were all nice ladies and gentlemen when they were out of work. The ladies sang divinely

after supper, keeping all our neighbours awake up to four or five o'clock in the morning, while father and his friends sat and talked about the latest books and discussed their merits. They were all born critics, these friends of fathers, who boasted that some day, when they had more time, they would write masterpieces for themselves. I don't know how much more leisure they could have squeezed out of life than they possessed already.

It was when they got into billets that they showed the nasty sides to their characters. Then they got what is called 'swelled heads,' and only remembered the simpletons who had helped them by giving them kicks and stabs in the dark.

José didn't care much for those gentry, and she took care not to see too much of them. She was at her classes all day, and at her studies all the evening until bedtime.

Father was also always trying to keep them at bay—that is why he went to the country so often, and moved about so much in the vain effort to evade them. He felt pretty free in the country, but business forced him back again to town, and then his friends soon found him out again. I've heard him say that Fleet Street and the Strand were in as bad a state, as regards footpads, as ever Blackheath could be in the worst days of the highwaymen; also, that no matter what money a man had in his pockets when he entered these streets, unless he had a heart as hard as adamant, he might congratulate himself if he had his tram fare when he left there.

He gave a sigh of the greatest pleasure when he heard that one of these gentlemen had got into harness again. I am sure he did his utmost to get them all into offices, when he saw a chance. 'It's another deadly enemy I am making,' he would say, 'but it relieves me from a friend, thank Heaven!'

During these two years we had shifted our abodes five times—twice into the country and back, carting all the furniture and books with us; once into apartments, next into a flat, and, lastly, into a house of our own again.

It must have cost father a great deal of money to make these rapid changes, with the money-lending and entertaining of so many extravagant and profitless visitors. I expect he made a good deal of money by his work, seeing that he had such a crowd of intimates; but I don't think he ever saved any, and I know we were often forced into funny extremities in order to raise the wherewithal to live. However, as I have said before, dad always raised it somehow and kept us in food, even if we had at times to go about a bit shabby in our clothes while waiting on the next cheque.

It was not a very enjoyable life for him, I daresay, for he had to work terribly hard when left alone. I could see also how fast his hair was turning white during the last two years I was at home. He hardly ever went out now, except when sent for on business, and even then he would hurry back again to his work. No; I don't think he led a particularly happy life, in

spite of those lively guests ; but when people once get into certain lines in London, they must run along them to the end, like tramway cars.

Before we left the house we were in when I ran away, Aunt Calypso came on a month's visit to us from Paris.

We had not seen her since we were children, as dad and she had had a big quarrel, and she had been living all these years abroad. They had been quarrelling and making it up again all thier lives. They would be great friends for a week or two, and then they would fall out over some foolish trifle, and not speak to each other or write for years sometimes. I expect they had what is called incompatibility of temper towards one another.

She was a howling swell, and brought over so many packing cases of dresses and jewellery that our little house was fairly crammed up, and all the rooms smelt like a perfumer's shop. Silk-lined costumes, sealskins, and all sorts of glittering stuffs like serpent's scales, diamonds, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones, so set in silver and gold, that she might have sat as a model for the Queen of Sheba on a visit to King Solomon.

For all her unbounded display of wealth she came into the house as meek and gentle as a perfect saint. Her voice was just what I suppose Annie Laurie's must have been—'low and sweet'—and although she was getting slightly *embonpoint*, as the polite nation calls it—aunty taught us all a good deal of French while she was with us—she

was really lovely, with her golden tresses, her dark eyes, her white teeth and her soft, 'clear complexion.

Dad didn't make a good King Solomon to this Queen of Sheba. He was also pretty far advanced in *emboupoint*, as well as billiard-bally on the cranium. His tummy was more like that of an alderman than an Adonis.

When aunty presented her cheek for him to salute, with sweet forgiveness for all past offences, we all noticed dad growing purple with nervous trepidation. He hadn't been used to salutes of this kind of late years, and he felt decidedly awkward. We all laughed at him as he came over sheepishly and did the salute required. Even the three cabmen, who hadn't been paid yet, and who waited in the lobby, grinned broadly as they looked in and saw that salute. Only aunty was calm and self-possessed.

'Take my purse, Tom, and pay these men,' she murmured liquidly, as she sank on a chair and arranged her Duchess-like travelling skirts round her. 'It is from Charing Cross Station; that will be four shillings each to Clapham. Give them five shillings each, and put my trunks anywhere.'

The grins left the cabbies' faces like a winter sunbeam drifts from a hoarding. When they heard her speak about four shillings each they simultaneously opened their mouths to indulge in bad language. I could see that. Every London boy can tell beforehand when a cabby is going to swear, from a certain sad expression round the corner of the mouth and some puckerings of the eyes.

But when aunty said sweetly,—

‘Give them five shillings each, Tom,’ the cabbies didn’t smile, but they looked solemn and respectful. When I paid them, they mounted their boxes without a word and drove rapidly away, without even looking back.

Well, I needn’t go on describing all about aunty’s visit. I hate descriptions myself, and I want to come along to more exciting incidents.

Not, mind you, that Aunty Calypso didn’t give us some exciting incidents during that five weeks’ visit, for she did ; but if I was to tell you all that occurred between dad and her, from the moment when she came smiling, saintlike, into the house ; with one long oblivion of past wrongs rippling through her sweet tones, and the semblance of a crucifix in her tender smile ; until the moment when she ordered me to fetch some cabs and remove her goods after she had screamed at father, ‘cochon !’ why, I think you’d have no time to hear about my adventures at Klondyke and Alaska.

Let me kindly draw a veil over that tempestuous month on the northern side of Clapham Common. I loved Aunty Calypso. We all loved her, for she was a splendid cook and treated us most kindly. I have reasons for loving her more than the rest, as you shall see presently.

Perhaps father was to blame. I won’t say that aunty hadn’t a bit of a temper, nor did she wait to consider her next words when she was roused, either in speaking or writing ; indeed, I don’t think she considered her own words or the feelings of the one she was angry with, but she

was a good sort for all that, in spite of these peculiarities.

Dad drank more than he usually did while aunty was with him; he was also much more sarcastic in his remarks.

Aunty Calypso liked respectability and outward appearances, which dad didn't care about. When he made a remark, she contradicted him flat: they never could agree for five minutes at a time about anything.

Therefore they parted once more, and she vowed she'd never speak to him in her life again, for he had treated her most cruelly.

But she also said as she went off that she loved us all dearly, and that she forgave us for having such a beast of a father.

Poor old dad! he hadn't many friends in reality I expect, with the ones who quarrelled with him, and the ones who wouldn't as long as they needed him.

I met Billy Cane a few nights after our return. I knew how he had got on with his dad, and when he asked me how I got on with mine and I told him, he began taking off his jacket.

I expected as much from a boy of Billy's disposition, therefore I responded by taking off my jacket, and then we set to. It was a pretty mill, taking it all through. I plugged up Billy's eyes and broke a tooth; he swelled up my nose, ears and lips to twice their size, besides spilling a deal of claret betwixt us. Then we parted chums, as ever, and didn't see each other for a long time afterwards.

In the country I got a job with a housepainter and worked with him for a month or two, while I was waiting and worrying my dad to get me a ship.

At last the welcome news came. He had succeeded in getting me an apprentice's job on board a merchant clipper bound for Sydney. Glory! I was to be a real sailor at last.

CHAPTER VI

MY FIRST VOYAGE

DRESSED in a lovely blue suit, with anchor-stamped brass buttons, a smart-peaked cap with the richest design upon it—my captain, Captain Swift, had planned out and drawn that crest for the Company, and it was the best design in the mercantile service, barring none.

I walked the streets of Clapham and Brixton with my sister and brother as Mr William Terriss walks the stage of the Adelphi, with conscious dignity—the dignity of a sailor. I tried not to look proud; I felt awfully conceited for all that. Remembering my lessons from aunty, I walked negligently and with easy abandon, winking slightly at the girls who passed, and puffing not too furiously at my cigar.

A sailor patronises either a pipe or a cigar. The pipe is his comfort on his lonely watches, the cigar his solace ashore.

Cigarettes! Bah! They may do for the dudes and the shop boys. Give me a meerschaum for nursing chum of a long voyage, and a real Havannah when I am ashore to fit in with my uniform, and who needs call the king his uncle?

José, I saw, approved of me in my new rig-out, and was proud to walk with me through the streets. As for Conrad, poor boy, he was simply like a slave in his awestruck admiration.

I called on Billy before I sailed, and raised a perfect flutter in that dovecot.

'Don't you come here, you daring young ruffian, making our Billy discontented,' cried out his mother and sisters. I was glad his father was out driving when I called. 'Billy is in a grocer's shop now, and doing well.'

I chucked the sisters of Billy under their chins, and promised to bring them a lyre bird and some parrots when I came back; then, as I was being hustled outside, Billy came in for his dinner, and he gaped at me open-mouthed.

'Ah! Tom, if your father would only get me a ship also,' he gasped.

'Wait a bit, Billy. Stick to your sugar and tea for a while, till I come back again, then we shall see,' I remarked genially.

Billy waited for no dinner that day. He went with me over the town all through his dinner hour, worshipping my buttons and badge, as my brother Conrad did. I really think when a boy first puts on his uniform, he does feel noble—as noble as Mr Terriss looks on the stage of the Adelphi. By-and-by, when he gets used to it, other thoughts come in, and he forgets the glory of his uniform, but—more of that anon.

The ship to which I was appointed was called the *Astarlu*, a fine vessel of 1559 tons, and A1 at Lloyd's. Captain Swift was a splendid seaman,

having worked his way up from a fore-castle boy, and without having a grain of influence to back him. He was not much like a sailor to look at, although he was one of the very best for all that.

Pale faced and tall, with a soft, gentle way of speaking, and most polite, he might have passed for a clerk ashore. He dressed in ordinary light tweeds, which was, I think, a disappointment to me at first sight. I soon got over that, however, when I saw how he could manage his craft.

He was a strict teetotaler himself, and never smoked, also very religious, but he was not bigoted, for while giving us always good advice, he permitted each man to have his own choice between money and the allowance of rum. During the two years that I sailed with Captain Swift I never saw him lose his temper or treat anyone unkindly.

There were four of us apprentices in the deck-house, along with the third mate, the carpenter and the boatswain; and in the fore-castle twenty able bodied and ordinary seamen, including the cook and the fore-castle boy.

Good comrades they were all. They knew they had a good ship to work, and a sensible skipper to look after them, and these two things always keep Jack a good boy.

We sailed away in the month of February, leaving a terrible hard winter behind us. The Thames was frozen as far down as Waterloo Bridge, and all the way down to the open sea; beside the banks were thick layers of ice. It

was cold, I can tell you, lying inside the India Dock for the weeks I worked on board before we sailed.

We got into a big storm also in the Channel, and were nearly lost through the breaking of one of our anchors as we tried to heave to. After knocking about for a time, the captain was forced to signal for help, and go back again to Gravesend for repairs and a new anchor.

It was a fair start I was having in the matter of rough lines, but I didn't lose heart. The seasickness was worse than the cold to stand, but I wasn't long before I got over that, and then I didn't care what came next.

We had a big fire in the docks, just opposite our ship the night before we sailed, and for more than a week one of the most savage gales of the season. How it did blow and shriek as we fought our way down the Channel and into the Bay. The sleet and snow battered against us like gravel. The waves washed wildly over the decks, while the *Astarlu* rolled and kicked and plunged like a live thing. There wasn't a dry shirt amongst us for the next two or three weeks.

After that we went along fairly well, until we got near the Cape, when we once again encountered some very heavy weather, which stuck to us, more or less, for the rest of the voyage.

I was becoming of some use by this time, and had been allowed several times to take the

wheel, not only in fair weather but in foul. By Jingo! talk about queer sensations. Often I have been covered until I was nearly choked with the swamping waves while I was hanging on to that wheel for all I was worth. My feet in the air, or rather water, and not knowing whether I was under the sea or on board the *Astarlu*. That's a queer sensation, if you like.

Father had got me too large a pair of sea boots, on the advice of a stupid ass of a shopman. These boots nearly did for me several times when I was sent aloft. There is nothing more dangerous when one has to climb than sea boots too big. However, after I had all but fallen several times, I made a swap with one of the hands who had a small pair of rubber ones, and then I got on all right.

Of course, it isn't all play and show off on board a ship, as some boys may fancy when they see us sporting about on shore.

We have to work hard for our tucker, for that is all deck-house apprentices get. A shilling a month was the wages we had the first voyage, with the privilege of being counted with the inferior officers. The carpenter was an inferior officer also, and that made all the difference between us and the forecastle hands. Our grub was the same as theirs, but Captain Swift, being a kind-hearted man, sometimes sent us along, as a treat, one of the cabin dishes, to eat or to give away as we liked. As we were always in a chronic state of hunger we didn't give much away, as you may very well suppose.

Scrubbing the decks, carrying water and coals for the cook, and a dozen other duties which we would have turned up our noses at ashore, soon took a lot of nonsense out of us.

We were not fools enough either to wear our brass-buttoned toggery on board. No; we knew better than that. The oldest rags we had in our boxes were good enough to spoil with the work we had to do. We learned to use our needles also and make patches, from pieces of sail canvas, on our duds.

I learned a lot of things more than this on my first voyage—to wash clothes, and lay on paint and tar; to hang on to ropes and spars like a monkey, and, best of all, to be obedient to my superiors, and consider no kind of work degrading that I was asked to do.

I might not have learnt these things so quickly if my mates had been ignorant and low-bred. They were all good lads, however, who had been well brought up, and our captain was a man who set his men a good example. He never swore himself and always corrected those that did; therefore, I am bound to say that we heard less bad language on board our ship during the entire voyage than a boy or girl can hear any afternoon in the streets.

Captain Swift preferred to bring up his own officers when he could do so; therefore, he encouraged us to study at our leisure times, so that we might be ready to go in for our examinations. The present third mate had been an apprentice, on the former voyage, in his last year.

One of the boys was in his third year, the other now entering on his fourth, while Peter Glen and I were Johnny Raws.

We young ones had, of course, to fag for the older apprentices, in return for which they looked after us and taught us what they knew themselves. It was seldom that Captain Swift spoke to us, in consequence of which it made us regard him as humble subjects would a king.

We all called him the old man, when we talked about him, not out of any disrespect, for we respected him hugely, but rather because we looked to him for everything, even to our lives. As long as the old man was about to look after the ship, we didn't mind how hard the winds blew, or how high the waves rose against us.

The wind drove us a bit out of our way at about the Cape of Good Hope, so we had the opportunity of paying a visit to the stormy island of Tristan d'Acunha, where we saw Peter Green and his companions.

They were all very kind to us, for they lead a lonely life and are glad to see the few strangers who come. Their visitors mostly come in a different fashion to us, for they are cast by the storms upon those rocky coasts. Peter has saved many a poor fellow from a watery grave.

As we crossed the Indian Ocean, after saying good-bye to Tristan d'Acunha, we got into very bad weather again, the wind blowing mostly from the north and north-west, but sometimes veering round to the south-west.

We ran down a great deal farther than we

wanted, and came upon very heavy gales and tremendously high seas, the ship being washed fearfully, and at times being completely buried up in spume.

Our captain had an anxious time of it, for these seas did a great deal of damage to us. Besides, we were getting rapidly amongst the latitudes of the icebergs.

It was now the end of April. On the 29th we passed a very large iceberg in lat. 42.25 S. and long. 26.0. E.

What a sight that was to look at as we drove past it on the wings of the tempest, the waves mountains high and the berg towering like a great crystal castle.

Next day we drove between two more, not quite so large, yet frightful enough to scare us all, they were so close. After this we got amongst a perfect swarm of them. As far as we could see, they covered the raging ocean.

Some of them stood upright with the most singular shapes, and of all the colours of the rainbow. Others leaned about in all directions. They were toppling over constantly, and breaking up with the most awful crashings and noises like thunder.

The captain kept cool through it all, but anyone could see how anxious he was. All hands were employed during that dangerous run, and for three days none of us slept, as we expected every moment to be our last.

It was bad enough during the day, when the air was clear and the sun shining, but often dense

fogs came down and blanked out everything, so that we could only guess, by the approaching intense cold, the best way to steer. At nights, too, it was awful to hearken to those dreadful sounds, and only see the sheen of an iceberg with the sudden wave of coldness when you were almost butt on to it. Candidly, I think I'd rather tackle the Taiya Pass, with all its risks, than get amongst the icebergs of the Antarctic seas again. One experience of them is quite enough to fill one up for a lifetime.

It was on the 25th of June that we passed Cape Otway, with a good south-west wind that carried us through Bass Straits. We sighted Cape Howe on the 28th, and then, with light but variable winds, sailed on to Sydney, reaching it on July 7th.

We had been five months on the voyage, but I had learnt a good deal during that time, and I do think that I wasn't quite the conceited cub I had been when first I donned my uniform.

I was looking out for letters from home, but just imagine my astonishment when I saw a boat coming alongside, and in it father, José and Conrad.

I was in my most dilapidated pair of trousers and raggedest shirt, as, of course, I didn't expect anyone to come and see me, so, I suppose, I must own up and say I felt mightily ashamed to see them.

Being ashamed, and still a bit of a cub, I felt sulky, and instead of answering their wavings of handkerchiefs, I retreated to a lonely part of the deck and waited there on their coming.

I was on duty, and so could not alter my appearance without asking leave of the mate, therefore I was forced to wait and be discovered at the worst advantage. Disgusting wasn't the name for it.

I was glad to see them here, of course, yet I'd have been gladder if they had only given me some warning.

There they were, though, speaking to the mate, and looking about for me. The boys were running about shouting 'Tom Prince' in all directions, so I was forced, nilly-willy, to come out and face them.

'Hullo! Tom,' cried my father, as I shambled forward, feeling very sheepish; 'hurry up and get dressed; the officer here has given you leave to go ashore.'

'Yes, you may go, Tom; only be back to duty to-morrow.'

I touched my cap to the mate, and very soon had my old duds off and my person arrayed once more in glory. Then I issued from the deck-house, feeling more genial and disposed to overlook small offences against etiquette, and joined my relations.

Father had got a disgusted fit on him for England—artistic people often take these fits—so he had done the usual, only on a more extravagant scale—brought them all out to Sydney for a little airing, and to give me a pleasant surprise.

José was as cool as ever about it. She had enjoyed herself at Naples, and visited Pompeii and Herculaneum, looked about Port Said and Suez,

Aden, Columbia, and seen more places than I could mention, while I had been getting my hands into a fine horny condition.

Conrad, however, still admired me prodigiously, and that was some solace to my feelings.

We all went back to a little furnished cottage overlooking Double Bay, which father had taken, and after the first surprise was over, I was glad to find my family on the spot to make me comfortable.

CHAPTER VII

MY SECOND VOYAGE

SYDNEY didn't seem to agree with father in any sense. He had been here for over six weeks before we arrived, waiting on us, and he said that he had never passed a more wretched six weeks in his life. He looked it also, for he was ill and grumpy and had not taken a single sketch during the whole time.

I'll not repeat all that he said about them and their habits and institutions. How their whisky was poison, and every article they sold doctored up and adulterated, with his other criticisms, as that would take too long a time.

Certainly, I did find out for myself before long that one had to be very diplomatic if one wanted to lead a pleasant life in Sydney; also, that they were pretty crafty about laying traps for one. They would pretend to ask you for a fair and open criticism, and even chuck in a few disparaging remarks so as to lead you on, but ware out if you did speak out—that's all.

It was in Sydney that I found out that to criticise one's hosts to their faces is not quite the way to become beloved. Father had one or two Sydney friends who used to be great critics of this

sort, and he said they were the most useless and graceless of the whole gang.

Now, Sydneyites are, as a rule, mighty critical about everything that is not made or born in Sydney, but their very gorges rise against the stupid outsider who criticises them.

My shipmates knew all about this childish sensitiveness on their part, and advised me to do nothing but praise everyone and everything I saw.

I took this advice, and, in consequence, got on splendidly with them while I was there. I started with the thing expected of me, and praised the harbour as being the most beautiful scenery I had ever seen. I went into raptures over their domains and the Botanical Gardens, and never stopped singing them up.

I almost got into trouble one day by praising up a judge who was trying a would-be murderer. However, I got out of it, when I saw the judge was unpopular at the moment, by turning round and praising the murderer, then I was all right again. I praised up their streets and buildings, particularly their grand Post Office, with its splendid carvings, and told them boldly that we had nothing like them in London. I praised their cable cars and girls—and I did this sincerely, for the cars ran up and down the hills like express trains, making one's heart fairly jump as they swung round the corners, while the girls came about us in shoals, and were so free and lively, as well as pretty, that they kept up the heart jumpings which the cable cars had started.

Father expected far too much common sense and virtue out of the natives; that's why he was disappointed.

Now, I was contented with them just as I found them — fond of holidays, cricket, football and picnics, just as I was myself. People don't need too much wisdom to enjoy themselves, so long as they can scrape enough money to do this. That's all Sydney people cared to do. If in the scraping together of the money they don't always do the job cleanly, one has to take into consideration their ancestors, you know, and make certain excuses for them on that account.

They are a funny lot though, I must say. I used to see a lawyer preaching at the street corners, and they told me he still practised at his old trade when he could get anything to do. They went almost mad with excitement over this attempted wife poisoning case, and never stopped holding indignation meetings and abusing the judge until they had got the man out of prison; then, when all the excitement was over, both the man and his advocates confessed that he was guilty, so that he was clapped back again into prison along with his solicitor and barrister.

They were always after this kind of game, I heard—hanging the wrong people, and holding indignation meetings over some criminal or other. Father wasn't far wrong in his estimate of their characters. They had not much logic nor common sense, but they were fond of enjoying themselves in their own way, and so long as the

strangers sang their praises and said they were smart and clever, he was sure to get on with them all right.

Father stayed in the cottage at Double Bay for a week or two after I landed, then, seeing that I could paddle my own canoe, he packed up and went off to Melbourne, with José, Conrad and little Ruth.

After this I used to go to the Sailors' Home with my mates, and we enjoyed ourselves rarely. They are very good to sailors, who want to walk straight, at these Sailors' Homes. All sorts of amusements are got up—picnics and tea-parties, concerts and dances, and lots of nice young ladies come about. There was always some little entertainment going on, and as for introductions, I cannot tell how many houses we were invited to, and made welcome at, all the time we were there. They give lodging to sailors who may not have a ship, and get them one as soon as possible. As long as a man or boy has a good discharge with him he is well looked after at these homes in any part of the world where ships trade.

I heard from them all in Melbourne. They had taken a house at St Kilda, and father seemed a bit more contented with his surroundings. He didn't know exactly how long he would stop in Victoria, but he would write me to London, if he wasn't there before me.

In September we set sail once more, and with the usual varieties of weather, got back to the India Dock a few days before Christmas.

I wasn't surprised to hear they were back in

Clapham again. Nothing dad did would ever surprise me now, I think, any more than it did José. We were a roving family, and it had been in our blood for generations on both sides.

Three months of winter in England and we were off to Australia again, this time to Melbourne. I was by this stage a pretty fair sailor, and could do my share of work with any of them, for I had grown hardy and tall and knew my way about.

The voyage out was a fine run, for we had a comfortable cargo and steady trade winds, therefore we got there in good time and in first-class trim.

The sailors had been speaking about the glories and pleasures of Melbourne all the way out. They vowed there was no finer city for enjoyment in the whole world. Even New York couldn't hold the candle to it for climate and fun.

I was eager to see it and so were those who had not been there before, and I must say that we were not disappointed. They call it the Queen of the South, and so it is, something like what Babylon must have been long ago—the wide streets, the mighty buildings. My word, as the colonials say, it is a place to be proud about, and no mistake.

We were invited here, there and everywhere. I can hardly tell how I got so intimate with them all, but we were that in no time, just as if we were brothers and sisters and had known each other all our lives.

I learnt to dance here, and as I could sing already, and knew a good many songs, I was greatly made of.

Sydney was very pretty, and the people nice

enough, take them all in all, but, as I have said, you had to be cautious and not offend them. In Melbourne you could do and say just what you liked. They were free and off-hand themselves, and they liked you all the better if you were the same.

They didn't go boasting about their bay, although Port Philip was six times as big, and with far finer scenery round it than Sydney harbour had. One could breath in that bay. They had a picture gallery and free library that was a wonder. Then there was Cole's Arcade, the biggest book shop in the world, where a fine band played in the gallery all day while you went round looking at the thousands and hundreds of thousands of books. You could get any book you wanted; in fact, anything else, at Cole's Arcade. It was so big that it spread from Collin Street to Bourke Street, and was like a perfect glittering fairyland all through.

I never saw any sight in my life like that arcade. Anyone could go there and sit for hours listening to the band and watching the gay crowds promenading up and down. You could also sit and read any book, the same as in a free library, without spending a penny. Mr Cole only drew the line at the cheap and trashy boys' books. If boys would go in for that class of literature they had to buy them, as free reads were not allowed at those stalls. I spent a good deal of time in Cole's Arcade while I was in Melbourne.

I was sixteen and a half now, and I was beginning to grow a moustache, so that I looked older. It wasn't much of a one yet, you know, yet enough

showed to make me go to the barber and have a shave now and then.

This time I wasn't quite so fond of football and cricket as I had been in the past. I liked them still, you know, when there was nothing more attractive going on, but I now enjoyed a good dance or a long walk through the Fitzroy or Carlton Gardens, with half-a-dozen or so of nice, jolly girls, and that we were never at a loss for in merry Melbourne. They were all happy and fond of larking, and most of them were fine-looking and handsome girls. Singular, isn't it, how people's tastes change as years roll on. When I was twelve or thirteen I didn't care a bit for girls; indeed, I thought them confounded nuisances. Now, however, I saw how mistaken I had been in my former opinions of many things, and amongst others, about girls. They were not the selfish and spiteful little cats I had thought them before, but real downright, obliging and kind-hearted chums.

And the older they grew, the kinder and nicer they became to a fellow. I went about a dozen or two of the smartest girls in the world: they were always laughing and hearty, and prepared to go out with us boys anywhere, and that's more than a boy would get full-grown men to do. Therefore I am right in saying that young ladies of seven or eight-and-twenty are far more like angels than are the pert minxes of sixteen.

While we were enjoying ourselves in this merry fashion, the old man, our captain, had a different time of it.

He could not for a long time get a cargo at all,

and talked about going over to South America or New Zealand in search of one.

At last he managed to secure a mixed cargo at very greatly reduced rates, which forced us to load very deeply in order to make any profits at all. We took in a large assortment of wool, tallow, hides, tinned rabbit and other preserves; also a large quantity of explosives, principally galignite and dynamite, as well as cartridges and returned whisky. There were 634 cases of 56 lbs. each of galignite, several hundred cases of whisky, a good number of cartridges and dynamite, so that you must understand we not only had a very heavy but a most dangerous cargo to carry. At any moment, from the shock of a rough sea, we might all be blown sky high; therefore, when I tell you that there was less swearing than ever on that voyage home, you will not doubt me, I fancy. Galignite and dynamite are not subjects to jest about when you have to sleep over them for four or five months.

The captain looked mighty anxious as we sailed deck-deep nearly in the water, and each day he got more careworn and haggard looking. He didn't like the commission, we could all see, but when a man has a company to serve, and a reputation to keep up, as well as a wife and children to support, he does not stick at danger—at least, not such a plucky man as Captain Swift was.

All went fairly well with us until we got near to Cape Horn, then the most terrific weather came our way, and our troubles really began.

It was as if we were cursed with bad luck this

return journey. Never had the oldest hands seen such a furious gale, nor one that lasted so long.

The *Astarlu*, overladen as she was, laboured and strained to an awful extent. We thought we should all have swamped and gone down. One man was nearly washed overboard, and altogether we had a very bad time of it.

Three yards came tumbling down on deck at the height of the gale. Things were stove in and smashed, and every moment we expected that the bumpings and shakings would start the explosives in the hold. The captain grew almost white haired during that tempest, while we went about our work without many words.

Well, thanks to having such a careful man at our head, we rounded the Cape without having any explosions, and when we got into fairish weather again we set to and repaired the damage as much as we could.

We had passable weather, although never too good, until we reached the North Atlantic, when on it came again as heavy as ever, and never after that had we a change or a rest, until the captain's heart was nigh broken, and the poor ship a perfect wreck.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WRECK OF THE 'ASTARLU'

FIRST one thing after another broke and came down on us, which we could only clear away. The rigging worked slack, and all our efforts could not make it taut again. Torrents of water flooded the decks, while the vessel was buffeted and lashed about like a log in a swirling rapid.

We were all very serious now, for we were driving out of the course of vessels, and with every prospect of being knocked to bits.

We kept good order, however, and obeyed orders, without any panic, for our captain went about as cool and as composed as ever, and that kept us all calm. He was one of the bravest of men in danger, and never lost his temper for a moment. But he took no sleep now, and he was looking like a ghost for whiteness.

On the 19th of January, when we had been in that storm for over a week, all at once the trunk of the rudder suddenly smashed, and the vessel was helpless, as far as steering power was concerned. Still, the skipper kept cool and did his utmost to save his vessel. The ship was rolling frightfully, while the huge waves lashed over her without a pause. I thought it was all over with us now, and so did

most of the others, but as our old man would not yet give in, neither were we going to while there remained an ounce of hope.

We started rigging up a jury rudder at no small risk to those engaged. We tried tackles and chains and every expedient a sailor can think of, without the least success.

The jury rudder snapped, the chains and tackle broke, and the vessel still drifted at a most alarming speed towards the north, every moment becoming more helpless and dangerous to live on.

Then our brave commander gave up the job as hopeless, and calling us all round him, with the tears rolling down his haggard cheeks, put his ship and himself into our hands.

It was a pitiful sight, and made most of us whimper to see our old man so broken down. It had been a long and stern battle against fate, and we had all helped him to fight it, but fate had conquered.

We asked him where we were, and he told us in lat. 48.34 N. and long. 21 W., which is 500 miles west by south of Cape Clear.

He told us, what the older seamen knew as well as himself, that we were fast being driven out of the line of ocean traffic. We must decide quickly if we meant to abandon the ship and take to the boats. Every hour was lessening our chances of being picked up.

A very short consultation took place amongst the men, and we decided unanimously to take to the boats. The ship was past all mortal help now, and the sooner she was scuttled with her deadly cargo the better.

While we consulted, our captain stood aside, the picture of despair.

It perhaps does not seem very manly for a big strong man to cry about a lost ship. We, however, did not think any the less of him for doing so, I can tell you, for we were all pretty well doing the same.

The *Astarlu* had been my home for two years now, and I knew every plank, spar and rope that was about her, and now that they were doomed to Davy Jones's locker, it felt as if we were about to kill and bury a dear old friend. God bless her! the dear old *Astarlu* that I shall never clap eyes on any more.

The captain had commanded her ever since she came out of the dockyard, and she was his first command.

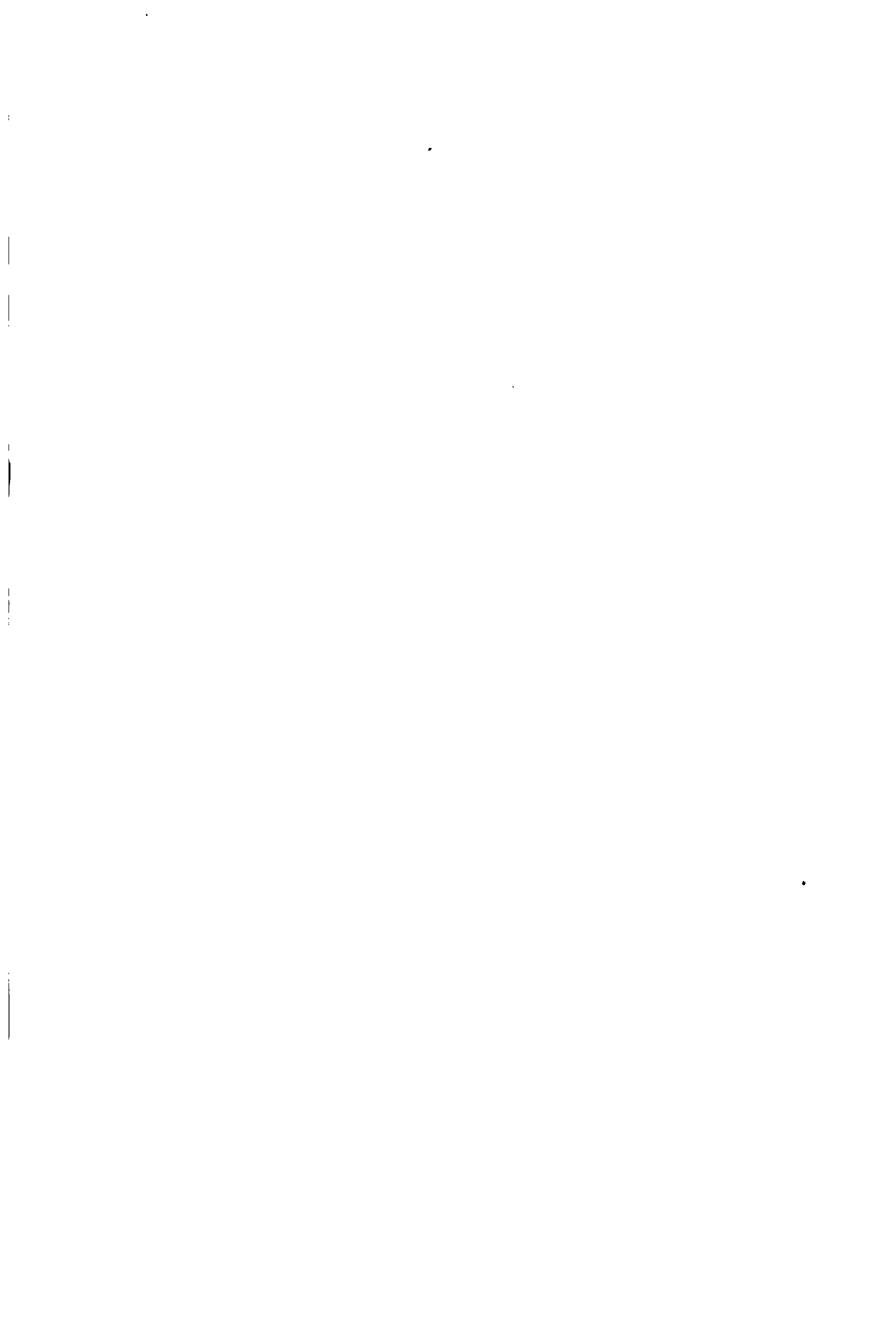
No wonder that he wept now as if his heart was bursting. We knew what a man he was, and we honoured and loved him for his grief.

When the first mate told him our decision, the skipper gave out his last orders as the commander of the *Astarlu*; after that he would be one of ourselves—a shipwrecked mariner.

The first of these orders was to hoist signals of distress, the second was to prepare the three boats, and the last was to the carpenter to go down and drill holes in her sides.

Along the outside of the bulwarks we painted, in large white letters, 'Dynamite,' so that vessels might be warned not to board her without due precautions, supposing she was seen before she sank.

Each man, now relieved from duty, went to get





Then commenced a scene which must have wrung the Captain's heart.

what he most valued in his box. We dressed ourselves in our best toggery, for there was no use saving them now for the fishes.

Then commenced a scene which must have wrung the captain's heart, although he could not in reason have objected to it—the looting of the ship. Each man was his own master now, and at liberty to take what he could carry with him.

We waited respectfully enough until the captain and officers had left their cabins, dressed, and with what they valued most in their handbags; then, as they nodded their permission, we rushed aft like wolves.

With hatchets, hammers, marlinespikes, whatever we could arm ourselves with, we flung ourselves into the cabins and storeroom, and rifled them to our hearts' desires, in the short time permitted to us.

Outside, the wind was blowing a gale. The ocean was seething white and driving us on with savage buffets, the sky grey and lowering, the rain and sleet pelting down on us furiously.

The ship was rolling and plunging about, with every plank and beam creaking and groaning dismally. The bulkheads cracked and swung at every kick and heave. Down below, the galagnite and dynamite rested like a sleeping volcano, and when it would burst up no man knew, but all dreaded it, and were eager to be off.

The waves broke over the low sides and rushed along the decks into the saloon and cabin, swamp-ing everything and burying us at times up to

our waists. The masts swung to and fro, tearing at the slack rigging, for the vessel was tossing about at the mercy of wind and waves.

And there we were, like a horde of ruthless pirates, smashing down doors and panels, and taking what each one fancied most and could carry easiest in his pockets.

Some went for tobacco and grog, others for groceries: they crammed their jaws with raisins and nuts, and filled their pockets with whatever they could stuff into them.

It was a wild scene of pillage while it lasted, but at length we had to give over. I snatched at a silver watch and chain belonging to the captain, which he had forgotten, and when afterwards I gave it to him, he appeared quite surprised, yet gratified.

Sailors are foolish chaps, however. I don't suppose they took five pounds' worth of stuff altogether amongst them in their excitement. I found a lot of utterly useless articles bulging out and spoiling my pockets, when I came to my senses, not worth a couple of shillings. As for my chum, Peter Glen, he had crammed sugar, salt, pepper, mustard, flour, raisins and nuts all together into his pockets, without the least idea of what he was doing.

While we were still occupied with our insensate work we heard the mate's voice shouting out 'ship ahoy!' That sent us with a rush outside. Away in the distance we could see a ship bearing down upon us, and then, cheered by the sight, we set to lowering the boats.

It was the *Port Armagh*, bound for Queenstown, that had seen our signals of distress, and was now coming to rescue us. We got down the three boats, and putting into them what effects we could snatch up, we rowed away towards her.

She was standing out some distance, and had signalled that she could not come closer with the gale then blowing; therefore, we had two or three hours' hard pulling before we came up to her. Half the men rowed and the other half baled out constantly, otherwise we should have been swamped.

At last we got on board, and were most kindly received by both officers and men. Trust a sailor to act the good Samaritan in time of need.

As we sailed away we took our last look of the good old *Astarlu*. She was still lumbering about the waves, not any deeper, seemingly, than when we abandoned her.

But we all knew that in another twelve or twenty hours she would make the final plunge and go down, with her explosives, to where anarchists and socialists were not much encouraged.

At the bottom of the sea the big fish swallow the little ones without any more compunction than the capitalists feel ashore; but at the bottom of the sea the small fish don't think about retaliation or fighting for their rights: they bolt or they are bolted.

Well, we got safely into Queenstown, and were made great heroes of by the spontaneous and enthusiastic Irish.

It's a lovely town is Queenstown, with steep

hills and pretty houses. The girls also beat all creation hollow for their kindness and interest in unfortunates such as we were.

I only stopped from Saturday to Monday, but in that short time I found hundreds of wellwishers. They took me off to church, prayed for my future safety from peril, and gave me a specially blessed scapula to wear for their sakes, if not for the grace of God. They believed that the token would ward off evil from me, and *sure* I wore it out of affection for the dear creatures.

We were kissed when we went away by a dozen or two of pretty red lips, and our hands nearly shaken off by the boys. As for the hearty blessings and God-speeds that were chucked after us, I'll never forget them, though I live to be a hundred. The Irish are the kindest-hearted and most generous people in the world, if Queenstown natives can be taken as a fair sample.

Crossing the Channel though was a cross. We went steerage—that is, deck, of course—being hard-up seamen, and after we got aboard the packet a thick fog came on that kept us thirty-six hours without any grub.

Ah! what an appetite we all had when we reached the Sailors' Home in London. The one I raised down at Gravesend, when I ran away, was a baby compared to it. It took us a couple of hours to set it down, it had risen to such gigantic proportions.

That night I made straight for Clapham, arriving just in time for supper. I had another, though a gentler, appetite by that time, just enough to

polish off the best of a pound of rump steak and a dish of potatoes.

Father was glad to see me, and didn't care that I had lost my kit, so long as I had brought my carcase home.

For the next three or four days I luxuriated in loafing, eating and sleeping. I hardly wanted to go outside at all. It was delightful to cuddle between the sheets and forget all the cold, the wet and the hard work, not to mention the dangers of a sailor's life.

CHAPTER IX

WE LEAVE ENGLAND ONCE MORE

AUNTY CALYPSO and dad were strangers still. I heard she had left Paris and had a house in London, over by St John's Wood.

I had no quarrel with her, and I was very fond of her ; so, as father left me to do as I liked, I wrote to her and received a warm invitation to make her house my home.

She had a beautiful house, for she was rich enough to live in comfort, and she liked to surround herself with articles of vertu.

They call articles of vertu all the miscellaneous stuffs you see in a curiosity shop — bronzes, statuettes, enamels, miniatures, china, and those sort of things. Well, aunty had her house so crammed with those curiosities that one had to pick his steps moving about, in case he smashed something precious.

But she was awfully good and kind to me while I stayed with her, and almost spoilt me with her lavishness.

I spent six weeks with her, and went with her to all the first nights and matinees. I saw poor old Sir Henry Irving doing Napoleon and Richard the Third, and nearly disgraced myself by laughing

when he had to be lifted up after kneeling to Lady Anne. It was wrong to laugh, I know, for he did it splendidly, and a man can't help getting stiff in the joints, but boys will be boys, and where love-making is being done, they notice these things. Helen Terry is lovely though ; I don't think she'll ever be anything else, no matter how old she grows.

I became a perfect man about town while staying with aunty. We went everywhere, and I was introduced to all the tip-top singers, actors and actresses. I used to have a little breakfast in bed, then a hot bath, and after lunch we went out for the afternoon and evening.

We had dinner at all the swell places, with champagne, lafite and half-crown cigars ; that is, I smoked the cigars, while aunty looked on smilingly and paid for all.

Father was cross with me over all this extravagance, and used to write me letters and lecture me about the Spartans and that sort of thing. But as Aunt Calypso said, I had gone through a lot of trouble, and needed a little change.

Well, I had the change, and I don't think it spoilt me much, although it might have done if I had stayed too long at Villa Heliotrope.

I had picked up a chum coming home called Harold Brownlow. He joined our ship at Melbourne as an ordinary seaman.

He was a stuffy little chap, who looked younger than me, although he was two years older. He had ran away from his ship in Australia, and for two years had seen a lot of life roughing it in the bush of Australia.

Blue-eyed, broad-shouldered, and plucky as they make them, Harold chummed on to me, and we resolved to join fortunes together next time we went out.

Aunty liked him when I introduced him to her, and as he had a brother in Africa we half made up our minds to go there.

I was tired of the sea by this time. That last trip in the *Astarlu* had satisfied me, though I wouldn't tell father that. Just as we were thinking about South Africa I had a letter from Peter Glen, asking me to join him in an expedition to British Columbia. He told me that they were finding gold on the Yukon River, and if I could raise a hundred pounds our fortune was sure.

I spoke to aunty about this and showed her the letter, and she said she would fit me out and lend me the dollars. Then I wrote to Harold, and he said he could raise the needful also. That was enough for me and I began my preparations.

When I broke the news to dad, he began to preach about the difficulties and dangers. He got to reading all about the country, and told me it was throwing my life away.

But I had done that already and come safe out of it, so I laughed at his warnings and told him no more until we had got all our preparations completed and our tickets taken out. Then I persuaded aunty to invite him over for a little palaver.

Dad came, and aunty and he met as Bismarck and William of Germany might. They saluted, and started business.

Dad listened while I told him my plans, then he made his objections, as I expected he would.

'You are very late in making your objections,' said aunty in her most severe tone. 'I have done my best for the boy; the passage is paid for, and his luggage all bought. Why didn't you speak sooner?'

I had not informed aunty that I had kept all these preliminaries and arrangements dark from father. I thought it best not to, for I knew her temper and his.

Dad looked at me and then at aunty, and opened his mouth as if he was going to say something. The danger signals were flying from the eyes of aunty for a good old row, therefore he didn't say anything at all. He only walked over to the whisky decanter and poured himself out a small drink, not being too sure about lady's whisky. Then he returned with the glass in his hand and said,—

'Since all the preparations are complete, I can only wish you good luck.'

He didn't stay long after this. He only said in a quiet way, with his eyes a little moist,—

'Come over and see us before you go, Tom, and bring aunty with you if you like.'

Dad was pretty hard up at this time. He had some heavy bills to meet. I fancy he owed aunty some money also, and that was why he didn't flare up as I expected he would.

We both went to see him off at the station. I was a bit sorry for dad that night, for he didn't often show the white feather, but when the train went off I saw him leaning his head on his chest and looking almost as haggard as Captain Swift had done when he abandoned the *Astarlu*.

Aunty said, as we went home together, 'What a bad-tempered and unreasonable man your father is, Tom. Here I am doing the best I can for you, as I would do for any of his children, and yet he does not appear to be the least grateful.'

When I went to bed that night I thought father and Aunty Calypso could never be friends for long. They didn't understand each other one bit.

Aunty Calypso was the sweetest woman in the world, and the most generous—as long as she was interested in the person she took up.

But she liked to be boss, and she could not stand contradiction. Also, she always had a good income and a bank account to draw from, therefore I think she could not possibly understand people in father's position, who were forced to depend upon their brains for their living.

I don't think it is any hardship for a workman to live on his small wages when all his friends are in the same position, but when a poor man has friends who can afford cabs and half-crown cigars, also ten-shilling lunches, with all the other etceteras, and who do not understand the coming down to sixpences, it is hard to be independent on brain wages. I enjoyed myself with aunty, but I think sometimes that dad was partly right in his own way to wish that I had not. Sometimes means since I have tackled the world really for myself.

It is not good always for a boy to have too much pleasure to look back upon. It is apt to make him discontented with the present and extravagant in his spending. He acquires tastes, also, which some young men should not acquire

who have their fortunes to make. It is not the most commendable thing for a poor man to be a judge of cigars and wines, and I fancy that is what father meant.

He was ideal in his notions, and always wanted to find heroes and heroines. This is how he quarrelled so often with aunty.

They both managed to keep their tempers wonderfully so long as I was in London. Aunty was very proud of me, and liked to show me off to her friends, and if they didn't like me so much as she did, jealousy, I fancy, had a good deal to do with their coldness. Like dad, she had always a lot of cadgers running about her, trying to get all they could out of her.

My presence, therefore, being a slight bar to their mendicity, they must have hated me accordingly.

It was beautiful to watch dear aunty thirsting for a row with dad on such occasions as they met before I left, and his frantic efforts to keep from accepting her many challenges.

José and I both laughed over it, for we knew how hard it was for him to keep up this lately-patched peace.

But he held in his angry passions with an iron hand, and agreed with her in everything she uttered. A single dissent on his part would have brought down the tornado with a fell swoop.

They both came to see me and my chums to the steamer, and nobody could have been more angelic than her bearing towards him on that occasion.

The explosion, I heard, took place a few weeks

afterwards. The cause of it was father attempting to repay her what she had spent on me. José told me about it in her letter, how the battle royal had raged furiously by correspondence, and then once more the silence of enmity descended.

Aunty didn't like people to try to get out of her debt, and as for dad, he always used to say he felt much more at ease when they were foes than he did when they were friends.

But enough about these trivial subjects. I am coming to some scenes a deal more exciting than the bickerings of two benevolent people who agreed best at a distance.

Peter Glen, like me, stuck to modest blue cloth suits as our travelling rig-out, but our friend Harold Brownlee came out of his shell in an enormous and sportsman-like get-up. Now that he had quitted the sea as a business, he seemed determined to banish all semblance of sailor from his personal appearance.

He had got himself up like a gentleman farmer on a shooting expedition, and in such an aggressive state of newness that we both fell promptly upon him and pinched him heartily. Leggings, shooting-jacket and riding-breeches all complete in light fawn colour.

'Hallo, Harrold, going to ride over to America?' we asked him.

'No, but we may have some riding to do on the other side, and I want to dirty my suit on the passage a bit, so as not to look a new chum—a tenderfoot, I mean.'

'By gum, but you do look a heavy toff and no mistake,' said Glen.

Aunty had provided me with a case of St Julien to drink on the passage over. That case I carried on my shoulders for fear it should get broken by the porters. I stuck to that case until I had safely stored it in my bunk, and left my chum to look after the rest of the luggage.

Ah, well, leave-takings are wretched affairs. There we all stood staring at each other, sometimes wiping away the wetness that would get into our eyes, or grinning foolishly to hide our emotions.

We had made up our minds to find a fortune out in Yukon, or leave our bones there amongst the ice and snow. Would we ever see old England again and those loving friends?

At last the signal came for all visitors to leave the ship. Some kisses and God bless you, and then the three of us climbed the shrouds a few feet, to see them as long as possible, while the tender took them ashore.

Then we all were waving our handkerchiefs and cheering like mad as the water widened between us. As they went farther off I saw aunty jump on a box or something to get a better sight of me, and next moment dad got up beside her, so that they were above the other visitors.

Just what I expected happened, and would have warned them about had I been near enough. As the tender bumped against the landing, they both disappeared from the box. That was the last I could make out of the quarrelsome but kind-hearted pair.

'Don't I wish I were a boy, Tom,' José had remarked as we parted. Didn't I wish she had

been one also, for I wouldn't have been much afraid of going anywhere with her.

I suppose they felt miserable enough that night. I know we did as we sailed down the Channel. Peter Glen was a lanky chap of the same age as me, and as we had been two years together we knew each other pretty intimately. Harold, though older, was a head shorter than us and looked younger, for he had not yet any appearance of hair on his face.

I looked the oldest, and because of this, I suppose, also, that I had more to say, they both generally did what I wanted them to do. That was all right, for like aunty, I liked to have my own way also.

We were all pretty well provided with coin, over and above the through tickets we had to Vancouver. Our boxes also were packed with all that we could purchase in London for the long journey. As we were told, though, by the people who knew the country, that there would be a lot to buy over there; the advice that Iago gave to Roderigo, to put money in our pockets, had not been neglected.

We knew something of what lay before us, and as we sat down that night to sample the first bottle of claret, we made a vow to spend none of our borrowed cash on liquor. We would be done with the luxuries and refinements of civilisation as soon as we had polished off that case of wine.

There was an awful cram of emigrants in that steerage, and queer louts some of them were also.

Most of them were ignorant as calves, and country bred. We were not long in taking their measure, and asserting ourselves amongst them, like the experienced rovers we were.

At first Harold did not get the respect we did, by reason of his landsman's clothes, but he very soon cast these off and got into his more comfortable sailor rig, then we were all right.

The stewards of course soon saw that we were accustomed to the pitching of a ship and chummed in with us. They gave us lots of extra tit-bits that were not in the bill of fare, and other favours which made us more comfortable in our steerage quarters.

The grub allowed was all right, some of the fellows who had never seen beef in a blue moon grumbled of course at everything ; but I wish we may never have worse than we had on board that steamer. It wasn't the grub we objected to so much as the company who shared it and our beds with us.

They weren't bad chaps either once we got used to their piggish and uncouth ways. They were dreadfully narrow - minded and ignorant about everything except what they had been brought up to. You might have thought the world a little farm to hear them speaking, and when we told them of all we had seen how they did gape.

For all our close quarters, and our packing in like herrings in a barrel in these open layers of bunks below, the time went by quickly enough. None of us could bear to be idle, and as we knew how to do ship work, we soon were great chums with the seamen as well as the stewards. We lent

a hand in the rough weather, and won the goodwill of the captain and the officers. In return, they gave us all the information they could about the new goldfields, and these mariners learn a lot from the different passengers they carry.

By the time we landed at New York City we had as many wellwishers through all parts of the vessel as we had in Queenstown.

CHAPTER X

PAUL RAVENWOOD

THERE was one saloon passenger who glued on to us particularly, as the Yanks say. He was a mining expert who had a big experience on different goldfields. He was also a man who had been pretty nearly everywhere, and was now on the same expedition as we were ourselves. I suppose he was an American, for he spoke like one, yet not too pronounced. His name was Paul Ravenwood, and he stood over six feet in his boots. A splendid man he was, broad shouldered, and strong as a lion, yet with no superfluous fat about him. I should say he was about thirty years of age, with a short-clipped brown beard, and black hair. His features were regular and massive, with a good-natured expression on them generally.

There was nothing of the softy about him, however ; his bright, keen, grey eyes looked as if they were reading the character of the one he was speaking to, and that he was not to be imposed upon by palaver.

It was not till near the end of the voyage he spoke to us, but he had been watching us, and asking questions about us all the way.

One morning he came to our end of the ship and introduced himself.

'I hear you boys are meditating Klondyke. Is that correct?'

I informed him that it was.

'You know what lies before you, I suppose?'

'Not exactly all, but we intend to find out.'

'Exactly. Glaciers to go over? Ice and snow-covered mountains to climb?'

I told him we had been amongst the icebergs and knew what that meant.

'Rapids to go through, a mile a minute, if not faster, and studded with rocks, to touch one of which means certain death?'

'We have faced death pretty often at sea, sir, and travelled a good rate, too, before some gales.'

'With a grizzly wanting to chaw you up on some of the ledges as soon as you climb into his arms?'

'Then that would end our troubles.'

'Quicksands and mud bogs? Awful gorges to get through? A thousand miles of fearful peril to go through, all to touch that gold dust?'

'They are no worse than living for four months over four hundredweight of galagnite and dynamite expecting each moment to be blown up.'

'Have you done that, sonny?'

'The three of us have, sir.'

I told him then a little about the *Astarlu's* last voyage, and how we felt all the way from Melbourne till we left her scuttled.

He listened very attentively, and with puckered brows. As a miner he knew what such explosions were.

'Well, that was weird and no mistake. Did

you pray often on that passage? Don't be ashamed to own up if you did.'

'Yes, sir. The most careless Jack amongst us said his prayers regularly on that voyage. In fact, when we were not working, we were mostly praying all the time, as we did not get much sleep.'

'Ah, I guess so. Folks get mighty pious at such times. Well, your united prayers must have been potent enough to be answered, since the stuff did not burst up with all that bumping about. Angels' wings must have cradled it to keep it easy, for dynamite and galagnite won't stand as much agitation as even the most sensitive of females can. Yes, you were right to be religious on that ship. But, say, are you good at starving?'

'We've done it once for thirty-six hours in company.'

'In the cold or in the hot?'

'Cold. On the Irish Channel last January, with a freezing north gale blowing snow and sleet.'

'You'll do, lads. You have not been brought up on pap, I can see. Now, I'll tell you what I mean to do with you, if you care to join fortunes with me.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I am going to Klondyke myself in search of the same kind of dust as you are. I know more about how to find it than you do, I reckon. But we cannot work these kind of diggings alone, and I'd sooner have plucky boys like you for pards than feeble-backed men. You'll get stronger every day, whereas they are bound to get weaker. You see I am selfishly open with you.'

'I think the more of you for that, sir,' I replied. 'Most people I have met are selfish, though they generally try to call it something else, so as to impose upon the world.'

'Right you are, sonny. I am selfish enough to want good mates whom I can depend upon, and I am wise enough to want to keep them good friends by acting fairly to them.'

'That is the sort of selfishness that goes to make society. That is the selfishness boys understand and like better than philanthropy.'

I felt rather proud of that remark. It sounded smart. My new friend smiled indulgently upon me.

'Well now, I won't make you feel shy by complimenting you on that last aphorism of yours. What I want is,—you speak to your two friends. If they are agreeable to go with me, I'll go right through with you. I am a professional and qualified miner who has picked up some dust in most parts of the globe, particularly in California. I am by no means destitute at this present moment, although I want to make more, as most men do. I can shoot pretty neatly, both with the rifle and with the revolver, and although I never yet was so bold as to sleep with a quarter of a ton of dynamite under me, instead of a spring mattress, still I daresay I might come to do that also with a little of your education.'

I laughed at his funny way of putting things, and he also smiled genially.

'One thing I can say, and doubtless the captain can vouch for me so far, I never yet did a dirty trick to a friend.'

I gazed at him for a moment and felt my heart warm up to him. He looked both a brave and an honest, as well as a strong man. Boys' hearts are not difficult to win. I stretched out my hand to him silently.

He gripped it hard and said,—

‘What is your name?’

‘Tom Prince,’ I answered.

‘Mine is Paul Ravenwood. Now, shall we all go partners, Tom?’

‘I will, Mr Paul—’

‘Drop the mister, Tom Prince.’

‘I will, Paul Ravenwood, whether my chums do or not, but I fancy we all shall after I have spoken to them.’

‘Speak to them this afternoon and come along to my cabin to-night to discuss the important matter. The day after to-morrow we will be at New York, and if you all agree I’ll be your guide there and on to Victoria in Vancouver. The rest of our way, not knowing yet, I cannot act as courier.’

He strode away as he spoke as the bell for lunch had sounded. We would hear ours for dinner presently. When it is tiffin or lunch in the saloon it is dinner in the second-class and steerage. That is one of the methods whereby they distinguish the patrician from the proletarian on board passenger-carrying ships and steamers. It is a nice distinction of caste when one thinks it out. The difference between one o’clock and six. That’s all. And don’t the six o’clockers feel proud when they range aft for dinner, while the one o’clockers are trailing in for tea. Conceit isn’t in it on such high occa-

sions. It is exactly the same sort of feeling as I had when I put on my new uniform for the first time in Clapham—a cubbish and caddish sort of swelled-headism that will cling to people all their lives. If a king speaks to a duke, the duke gets it on him. If a duke patronises a lord, the lord gets it also badly, and so on, down the social scale until it gets finished up in the beadle patronising the pauper, and the pauper being philanthropic to some vagrant cat. Then pussy finishes the game by patronising the mouse, and patronage and clientism can go no farther, for *that* mouse doesn't get a single chance to patronise anything, not even the jumping maggot from a bit of ripe gorgonzola cheese.

I spoke that afternoon to my two chums, and they agreed with me that we could not possibly do better than take on this gentleman as our fourth partner, and let him be our boss on the diggings. It was good for us that we did so, and in the getting of such a friend we were more fortunate than many of the other gold hunters.

Paul Ravenwood received us in his cabin genially, and showed his satisfaction without reserve at our consenting to join him.

'Now, my lads, I'll make good gold-finders of you. A lot of tenderfeet rush to the diggings thinking that all they have to do is to squat down anywhere and dig up the dust. These sort of explorers generally leave the diggings poorer than they came, and greatly disappointed with their futile efforts. Now, I'll teach you how to know where gold is likely to be, and so save a deal of useless labour.'

We were flattered by his fixing upon us as his comrades, instead of looking out for men of his own age. We believed also in the reasons which he gave us for doing this.

‘I am a bit of a physiognomist, and have studied you young men considerably during the days we have been on this liner. I like young men of your age, for they have possibilities about them which have drifted away from older men. Your chances are all in front, not behind you. You have not yet been spoilt by misfortune or bad habits. I’d give a lot to be once more back to sixteen or eighteen.’

‘With the experience you have gained since,’ I ventured to remark. ‘Youth would be of no more use to you than it has been already without this experience.’

‘You are right, young Dr Johnston. I’d like the youth, with the experience of since, without its wounds and pains.’

He sighed heavily as he spoke, and looked over the sea, while he puffed hard at his cigar, and a very gloomy expression settled upon his face.

‘Experience, without its deceits and sorrows, is a real treasure to a man, but unfortunately he cannot have it dished up as he would like in this best of all possible worlds. Now, when a man is entering life he don’t find its troubles heavy, because he can do without easily when he hasn’t got it to do with. His tastes have not become slave-drivers as yet, and though he may be ready to enjoy good living, still he would not give up his aims and aspirations to keep the animal comforts. That is

why I like boys better than men: they have not become slaves to habits.'

'Nor will we ever!' we answered stoutly.

'Don't be boasting too surely. Say, do you like those cigars?'

He had given us all nice cigars when we were in the smoke-room, and we were enjoying them immensely now on deck.

'Of course we do like them; yet it wouldn't cause us the least trouble to give them up.'

'Then chuck them overboard.'

With easy laughter we did as we were ordered, and sent the cigars flying.

'Ah, you can do that now easily, as I expect you could if they were the last to be got. I wonder if you will be able to do the same at forty?'

'Why not?'

'If you reach that age you will find out, but I hope, long before that time comes, that you may have made your positions sure, and so be beyond the reach of having to say "no" when you want badly to say "yes."'

'But "No" is a good word, Paul.'

'The most heroic word in the English language, my boy; but it takes a hero to be able to say it sometimes. Any fool can say "yes."'

'And if it's good for a boy, it must be good for a man also.'

'Better if the man could say it. A plucky boy is always a bit of a hero. It is easy for him to be heroic.'

'And cannot the man be that also?'

‘He could ; yet there are few heroes after forty.’

‘Why?’ once more we asked.

‘Wait and you will find out. But enough of this preaching. I am still young enough in my spirits to be able to hold my own with you in the matter of endurance, as I hope to show you. Now, good-night. I am going to turn in.’

He rose from the deck chair as he uttered these last words, and pitching the rest of his cigar also over the side, he held out his hand.

‘Good-night, sir.’

Two days after this we landed in New York and were taken by our new partner to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, which is one of the largest in the city. It has a thousand rooms.

We wanted to go to the Sailors’ Home, as those swell places looked too like dollar-melting houses for us. He told us, however, to put ourselves in his hands, and be his guests while in New York.

What a city that is for bustle and modern improvements, and how the Americans can eat. I thought, as I watched them putting things away at Delmonico’s and elsewhere, that I would not like to cater for a company of them over the ground we were about to travel. They made such a serious business of their feeding, and ate so rapidly and much, that I wondered how they managed to walk so quickly afterwards.

A famishing American, accustomed to the luxuries of New York, must be worse than a starving grizzly bear. ‘You are poor eaters,’ said our friend, after we had stuffed ourselves until we were almost choking. ‘I have observed that this is one of the

peculiarities of the English: they cry off just when we are beginning in earnest. Now just watch that fragile young lady over there, and see how she does.'

I had been watching the said young lady with fascination as one might watch an anaconda covering a buffalo. She was having a little lunch of oysters, clams, gumbo soup, with several entrees, and, as Paul said, was now beginning in dead earnest to demolish the solids.

As the waiter had placed all the courses before her on the table at the same time, there was no attempt at concealment as to what she devoured, neither did her extraordinary stowage powers seem to astonish any one except ourselves. They were all engaged in the same heroic game.

'It is a good thing that American brides usually bring large fortunes to their husbands,' I remarked reflectively.

'Why, Tom?'

'Because I don't think any ordinary income would keep them in tucker; that fragile girl must have got through a month's wages of a London clerk in this single lunch, and yet she is able to walk out with a light and springy step.'

Paul laughed and answered,—

'Oh, that's nothing, Tom, my boy; she'll be having tea and buck-wheat cakes in another hour's time, and between this and then a pound or so of sweets. Then she'll go home with a fine appetite for dinner and supper. That is so.'

'Her father must be a millionaire, then.'

'I guess he is not a poor man, Tom, otherwise she could not lunch at this restaurant.'

We did not make the acquaintanceship of any New York girls. We were afraid that if we did, and they got hungry, we should have no money left to carry us to the Yukon. They were too expensive articles of vertu for lads in our present position even to smile at.

It is a wonderful city, with its miles of avenues and sky-scraping buildings, its aerial railways and its large theatres and music halls. Everything is on a big scale here, and all fitted up with the most magnificent modern inventions.

We went to Booth's Theatre, the Bowry, Olympic and the Tammany, also to Wood's Museum and the Atlantic Garden Circus; our fourth partner paid for everything and treated us royally. In fact, he seemed to have so many dollars and greenbacks to fling away that I wondered why he was going to risk his life going to Klondyke after more.

I expect it was the love of adventure that urged him on. I fancy also he must have had some disappointment in life, which made him restless and eager to banish reflections. He often took very depressed fits, and then he would hurry us off to some entertainment, where we enjoyed ourselves, if he did not, always.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE GREAT PACIFIC RAILWAY

I THOUGHT I had seen a good deal in my life, but from the day we left New York until we landed our packages at Dyce, at the top of the Lynn Canal, never had I looked upon scenery so crushing in its stupendous grandeur and variety.

Paul Ravenwood examined our luggage carefully before we left New York, and casting aside whatever was likely to prove an encumbrance and a useless expense from duty, he stored these against our return.

'We will have to purchase a great deal at Juneau, therefore there is no use carting ornaments and fine raiment to be charged heavy duty for.'

Then our jewellery, fancy goods and Sunday toggery, with white shirts, collars and ties, went into bond, while we laid in a fresh stock of the heaviest flannels and clothes, warranted for wear and warmth rather than for show.

We likewise purchased a year's supply of food and medicines. The most portable stuffs, such as strong extracts of beef, coffee, tea and cocoa, flour, oatmeal, beans, and the most heat-producing powders and pastes.

Compressed vegetables and dried fruits we laid

in a large stock of, with tinned meats, of course, and heaps of cured bacon.

It was well we had a partner so experienced and with such a clear head for thinking on articles wanted. When we saw the packages piled up for transport we were astonished, not only at the number, but at the care with which they had been selected and divided.

'There will be a good deal of portage required, and we shall have to be our own porters after we are over the Chilkoot Pass. That is the route I have decided to take.'

We had unanimously chosen him captain and leader, while I was regarded as a kind of unrecognised second in command.

'That is how the packages are made up as you see them, so as to be a load each, and also easy to unpack and repack as wanted.'

What a host of things were required, and which we could not have thought about, for we had not studied the route as he had done, with all its difficulties and drawbacks, as well as dangers.

Materials for mining, also for building a boat or a house, snow spectacles, nails, bolts, screws, oil, rope and cord. We were going to a land where we could get literally nothing except ice and, possibly, firewood. We could not be always sure of the wood, but the ice would not be likely to fail us.

As for aught else, except grizzly bears in the winter and mosquitoes in the summer, it would be idle to expect. What we did not carry in we would have to do without.

As *we* had second-class tickets, Paul took second-class also to Vancouver, but from Vancouver to Juneau, and after that to Dyea, he insisted on paying our way saloon.

'It's not too cosy even in the saloon, you'll find, boys, going up there, but there is no necessity for us to get frost-bitten before we commence our little tramp.'

I believe he thoroughly enjoyed acting as our business manager. While we were driving about the city or in the theatre he would sit with his pencil and note-book out studying each item that he had purchased, and casting his thoughts forward to that arctic region. He did not see or hear much. He was think, thinking intently on what might have been forgotten.

At last he said, one morning at breakfast,—

'Yes, boys, I reckon we have every article that we are likely to require up in that inhospitable clime. Our guns and revolvers are the latest and the best, and as for ammunition, we have *a* goodly store. These are in my pack. Have you seen enough of New York City?'

'Yes, we had seen enough. We wanted to be up and doing.

'Then we shall go to-morrow and have *a* look at Niagara Falls on the way up to Montreal.'

I am not going to describe Niagara, for that would be simple cheek on my part. A dear friend of mine once went to Rome; when he returned and was asked to describe it, he said, 'What's the use of *me* doing it, when it has been done so often and so well.'

I only mention Niagara to let you know that it first knocked up my bumps of wonder and veneration, with its rush, its roar and its shaking, and prepared me for what was coming.

Australia is vast and fairly astonishing in its advance, also, it is a more genial climate to live in, but for pure, bracing, clear air and overpowering scenery, give me Canada, British Columbia and Alaska.

We stood watching the demoniac speed of the rapids above, and the snow-white, sparkling globes that leapt up from the gulf and burst into splinters of spray high in the air. We watched the maniacal leap of the river into that smoking and boiling gulf, and the rainbows that hung over it. We looked at Goat Island, with its trees, appearing as if it was going to be swept down also by those frightful rapids. Then a great silence and desolation fell upon us, the unceasing thunder had deafened us all. The sight of that murderous force had paralysed our feeble brains.

Peter Glen fainted quietly by my side, and I was nearly following his example. Harold Brownlee stood with lowering brow and heavy jaws firmly closed, while he watched the show with lurid eyes. Then Paul, our leader, thought we had taken in just enough, so he led us off for dinner.

It was terrific. There is always something terrific in a mass of water like that falling from a height. When waves ride up and break, there is savagery in them, but not death, but when they fall in the bulk, as Niagara falls, it means annihilation to all they fall upon. Paul didn't mind Peter

fainting and me turning greeny white. It was what he expected from us all.

'Better to have your swoon here than on the summit of the Chilkoot Pass; but I don't expect either of you will do that again.'

We took our places at Montreal for the through journey, purchasing our bed and bedding from the agent of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company at a very nominal charge. The through cars are most comfortable, there being no over-crowding permitted, and no jumping of places as one sees in Australia. They are also heated with hot-water pipes, in the second-class the same as in the first, with every facility for moving about.

By these means the horrors of a long journey are avoided. Indeed, it would simply mean death to most of the passengers if trains were arranged in Canada on the same murderous principles as they are in Britain.

Our meals cost us all through at the rate of one shilling each, while as for our luggage, we had no further trouble after we delivered it over to the proper authorities and received in return our cheques. We had, likewise, none of the changes to be anticipated in even the shortest journey in England; but when once we had fixed upon our car, we could safely regard it as our home during the journey, the same as the cabin is regarded on board a ship.

Montreal is a picturesque and busy city, built on an island, with its park on the top of the Mount Royal. We stopped here two days and enjoyed ourselves immensely, going about its new and old-

fashioned streets and sailing on the clear waters of the wide St Lawrence.

But we were eager to be closer to the goldfields; therefore, taking our places on the morning of the third day in the roomy car, we glided out of the splendid station and began our long journey.

Past the old French settlements, with their pretty cottages and thrifty-looking farms. On the one side spread the clear and broad Ottawa River, on the other distant laps of mountains.

Onward we rushed, past great sawmills and piles of logs floating on the rivers, past ships and large towns and big farms. Then the towns became villages and the great valley deepened and became narrower. The river had left us by this time, but there was plenty to see—rocky hills covered with pines, dark forests, rushing streams, falls and small lonely lakes.

We went to bed that first night without feeling any sense of fatigue. We had eaten often and heartily throughout the day, and taken plenty of exercise.

The train was still rushing along smoothly and swiftly when we lay down, but we were by this time quite used to its motion and felt as if in a hotel.

Next morning, when we awoke and looked out, we were flying along the precipitous shores of Lake Superior, sometimes high above it and distant over a mile, sometimes close to the water.

Across Nipigon River, along the shores of Thunder Bay, with its bright green waters and purple cliffs on the one side, and lap beyond lap

of blue mountains on the other. The Kammistiguia River flows deep and placid here as it comes from the gloomy forest to join the waters of the Lake Superior. Already we had come a thousand miles from Montreal, and only paused at Port Arthur to take on more cars and passengers who had come up by steamer.

A great number of the passengers were going on the same mission as we were. We could tell that as we looked at their rig-out. Some had their wives with them, but these were not ordinary women. We spoke to several of them while we rested at the stations, for in America the people are wonderfully free in telling their business and asking yours; but, as we were taken up mostly with watching the scenery, we did not get too friendly with them until we were camped together on board the steamer, and sailing from Vancouver northward.

The third day we ran through a wild and rugged country full of lakes, rapids and foaming cataracts; the rocks piled high above us; great forests stretched out, in many places burnt, with the blackened stumps and dead trees stretching their naked branches weirdly against the sky.

At Winnipeg we had another rest, while Paul Ravenwood told us how quickly it had sprung up into its present flourishing state from a few settlers' huts. Then away we rushed towards the Rocky Mountains, still a thousand miles ahead. What a land this Canada is for long reaches.

Across a rolling plain as smooth as a great billiard-table, which is not yet the prairie. The

line is as straight as it can be as far as the eye can reach, with snow-covered meadows. Past Portage-la-Prairie to Brandon the weather was piercingly cold outside, yet we were comfortably warm inside.

Over the prairie we rush, a dazzling white plain without seemingly any termination, past station after station, until we flew once more over broken ground, rocks, lakes salt and fresh, mostly at present frozen up.

Across the Saskatchewan River the train raced, past Crowfoot Station, and then the Rocky Mountains came in sight—snowy peaks and glaciers piling up like clouds against the clear blue sky. They were a hundred miles away, and between them and us the ground was free of snow and covered with cattle and horses, for this is the paradise of the ranchmen. Here the warm Chinook River keeps the ground fertile and clear of frosts.

For the next six hundred miles we went tearing through the Rocky Mountains, looking on such tremendous heights, such awful gorges and fantastic shapes of mountains, that our brains fairly reeled. If these were what we had to encounter in Alaska it was well that we had such a chum as Paul with us.

Past Calgary and Canmore;—past Banff. We were rising higher every mile towards the perpetual snow and ice regions. 'I guess that is something like where we are going to,' remarked Paul, pointing through the window toward the awful waste of dazzling whiteness.

We looked, and became serious. Could even sailors climb those giddy and slippery peaks?

As we ascended, we could hear the blizzards howling over the thundering of the powerful locomotive. We were warm and comfortable enough inside, but outside, could mortal man exist ?

It was all powerfully fascinating and terrorising, and so dreadfully solemn and lonely, yet so beautiful, that none of us could speak ; we could only watch and try to brace up our ebbing pluck.

'It's a deal worse to look at as we fly past so swiftly than if we were amongst it and at our leisure,' said Paul, encouragingly, but we were not reassured. I for one began to wish that I had gone to South Africa instead.

Yet now I was here, so far on the way, I wasn't the one, nor were my chums the boys, to think of showing the white feather. As we had heard some of the other adventurers shout while they quaffed their glasses—'It was Klondyke or bust.'

Afterwards, some of those who shouted this excelsior cry turned when they came to the foot of the Chilkoot Pass summit, and turned back sadly. Others went on a little farther and—disappeared. The Rockies are bad to look at from a train, but that is the easiest part of the business.

Yet it was tremendous to sit and watch these peaks towering into the sky ten thousand feet, with their white crests and icy sides, while lower the black rocks and bulging precipices bending over us as if they were coming down with all their weight of snow on our tops. It was all round and above us, as we rushed from one danger into another without a breathing spell, until we were

glad to cover our heads with the blankets and try to go to sleep.

Those fearsome tunnels also through which we had to pass, while the thumping of the engines and the roaring of the wheels filled our brains—it was awesome, to say the least of it.

Through deep ravines;—piercing projecting spurs;—hanging over fearful chasms, with avalanches and sky-high peaks above us, onward we rushed towards the vast Pacific.

Into the mist clouds and pine forests, past gigantic glaciers, through fair valleys, we crossed the Columbia River, and ran through the Selkirk Mountains. How sublime and beautiful those glaciers looked, rising so purely white above the dark pine forests. How furious those rapids boiled round the boulders below us, while we spin along as if we were passing through the air. It was all splendid and bracing for a boy and a strong man to experience, but surely it must have made the women wish they had stopped at home.

Down through the dark, narrow pass of the Gold Range, with its wall-like cliffs and black lakes. Here we saw trees of the most gigantic sizes and of all varieties. Then out to the open once more we dashed, with the crystal waters of the Shuswap Lake before us.

We were in British Columbia then, the country of our dreams and hopes. Past Kamloops and over the inky gauge of the Fraser River we flew as if through the air.

Into the terrible gorge we plunged, with its black and savage waters roaring and swishing

along in the semi-darkness. Hundreds of feet of wall hemmed us in, with only now and again a gleam of sky. We were passing round, hanging on to dreadful precipices by wedges and notches. The river, hundreds of feet below us, deafened us with its roaring, the cliffs towered hundreds of feet above us.

This was the most trying portion of our Canadian journey, and we were glad that it was so near the end.

The dreadful cañon ended, and once more we saw the daylight and the snowy peaks of Mount Baker, fourteen thousand feet high and sixty miles distant. Next, we dashed through a vast forest of giant trees, many of them three hundred feet high and thirty-six feet in girth. Then the ocean came into sight, and the first portion of our journey was over.

CHAPTER XII

OVER THE YACULTA MAELSTROM

WE were considerably crushed on board the steamer from Victoria to Juneau. Those who had booked from San Francisco had bunks, but we were obliged to put up anyhow and anywhere. Yet, as we were told, there was no good waiting, for the next boat would be more crowded still, therefore we prepared to make ourselves as happy as possible with our comrades, during the thousand miles we had to be compressed with them. After we got to Dyea we should have room to move ahead by ourselves. We were a jolly company of adventurers. Most of them were as free and reckless as the gladiators may have been while waiting on the Roman shows. Each man, woman and boy in that crowd could give, with truth, the motto—'*Aut vincere aut mori!*'

All sorts and conditions of men and women were there, for gold lures all. But there were not many cravens, or lovers of ease, and, take them all in all, according to their code of honour, they were mostly honest.

Indeed, honesty was the one virtue universally recognised and insisted upon, and the infringement of this law was promptly punished by death. If a man was caught cheating at cards, or stealing, he was shot, after being tried and sentenced by Judge

Lynch. There were no prisons, and no infliction of fines for any offence against the society of men and women who were proceeding to the outlying fringes of civilisation. No excuse was available for the criminal. If he was convicted, he was shot without delay, and there the matter ended.

Stern and primitive laws must be enforced in a primitive condition of society. Subtleties are not understood. They were an honest crowd, as a whole, although we saw several hang-dog and villainous fellows, who might have been anything you like in constitutional cities.

A lot of gambling went on *en route*, and one well-known professional 'sport' was with us, risking his life in the pursuit of his profession. It was a decided risk to win amongst those reckless fellows, who considered lives of less consequence than dollars, and seemed to think little enough about them also when the fever of play was on them.

Dan Fairmaner was the name of the expert card-player. He had come from San Francisco, and several of the passengers who knew him said that he had paid a thousand dollars over and above his fare to be allowed to exercise his calling on board. They said also that he had cleaned out several passengers on the journey between 'Frisco' and Vancouver, and that this was the reason we had found room, the unlucky players having been compelled to stop at Tacoma. Mr Fairmaner was a most civil speaking and polished gentleman. Not quite such an all round admirable Crichton and Adonis as the Jack Hamlin, of Bret Harte. Yet, if relentless with his victims, no man could accuse

him of swindling. He was only extremely lucky at whatever game he took up, whether it was baccarat, poker, simple nap, dice or pitch-and-toss.

He was a slight, boyish-looking man, clean shaven, and with firm, clear-cut features. His eyes and hair were coal black—the eyes steady and cold-looking, and the hair straight and thin.

Like Mr Primrose, he was much older than he appeared, being considerably over forty, although he hardly appeared to be thirty. But, unlike Mr Primrose, there was no weakness discernible in the face of Mr Fairmaner. He had eyes as bright and keen as those of a rat, only a thousand times more fixed in their stare, and a mouth that could close like a steel rat-trap.

I had a little experience of him and his remarkable luck at the beginning of the voyage, which gave me rather a wholesome lesson, although it might have ended my career as a gold seeker only for the help of my good friend Paul.

We were just waiting for the boat to start, when this slim-built and gentle-voiced gentleman fixed his mesmeric black eyes on me, and before I knew exactly how it happened, I found myself playing pitch-and-toss for dollars with him. I suppose he wanted to keep his hand in practice, yet didn't care to waste his time playing cards with such a young bird as I was. I became insanely excited, while he still remained perfectly composed, pocketing my dollars as fast as I lost them, and that was quick enough.

'It's a regular shame playing with so young a lad. I call it little else than downright robbery,'

called out a soft, clear voice from the crowd of spectators, in a tone of pity.

It was one of the women passengers ; but if she meant to make me stop, her words had just the opposite effect. Dan Fairmaner's next words made me desperate. With a mocking smile, he said wearily,—

'Just say when you are about tired of this slow game, sonny, and either give it up, or else raise the stakes, for I see some of the others want to have a chip in.'

'I'm game to raise the stakes,' I replied, thinking I was doing a plucky thing.

My mates were out of the way at the time, or, perhaps, I should not have been ass enough to throw out such a challenge to the like of Dan Fairmaner.

'As you please, sonny. What do you say—ten or twenty dollars a pitch?'

'Twenty dollars,' I shouted madly.

'Twenty dollars be it,' answered Dan, calmly.
'It will be all the quicker over.'

I knew that, alas! for already he had won nearly a third of all the money I had in the world. That soft-voiced woman, however, who still murmured her sympathy over my losses in the background, seemed to rouse all that was defiant and reckless in my nature.

I went on desperately, while an eager crowd gathered round us and watched our play.

It was a pure game of chance, which I do not think any science or skill could govern, and yet nine times out of every ten he guessed correctly while I was pitching, while almost invariably I guessed wrong when he hid the coin. I was des-

perately ashamed of myself as I saw the moment approach when I must give up. I felt almost as if I could have rushed through the crowd and plunged into the water over which we were now passing. A murderous fit of resentment was on me towards that calm, cold, precise gambler, who was so swiftly making a beggar of me.

Two more bad guesses and, as far as I was concerned, the game would indeed be over. I glanced behind to see if there was a clear road to the side of the ship, for I did not intend to survive my disgrace and poverty, and become an object of pity and mockery to my shipmates. As I turned round to look for the passage I saw Paul Ravenwood at my back. He laid his hand on my arm and made me spin right about, and as he did so he whispered to me,—

‘Now you are in this, keep it up till you win. I’ll back you for all I’m worth against that man.’

I saw stern and implacable hatred in his eyes as he fixed them on my antagonist. I think Dan Fairmaner noticed him now for the first time, for he started and looked troubled for a second. Then he quickly recovered his presence of mind, and tossed up the coin, it being his turn to do so.

‘Heads,’ I cried, and won, for we were playing ‘sudden death.’

I marked off one of my twenty-dollar losses. We were dotting down on paper our losses and winnings in order to save time counting out the money.

I tossed up next time, and Dan guessed wrong. He calmly dotted down his loss as he remarked pleasantly,—

'I guess that friendly twist round which you had has brought you luck at last, sonny!'

Perhaps it was that, or the good luck of Paul Ravenwood that helped me, now that he was backing me up, but from this moment fortune smiled upon me. My heart began to beat more evenly, for I was once again solvent as at the start of the risky game, and I began to think of giving up.

This, however, Dan was not inclined to let me do. The spectators also shouted for me to go on as long as luck was with me. They enjoyed seeing this expert losing. He also didn't seem to mind losing much, for he was as cool and affable as ever. Paul also again whispered for me to go on until he told me when to stop. Therefore I obeyed.

We played quickly. It was a smart pitch up, a grim 'heads' or 'tails,' and a dot on the paper, then the coin went spinning up again. In an incredibly short space of time I had won from Dan Fairmaner one thousand five hundred dollars, when I heard whispered in my ear the welcome word,—

'Stop.'

I was glad to hear this, for I was becoming more frightened than exhilarated with my success. Dan Fairmaner was as suave as ever, but his black eyes had a more rat-like gleam in them as he fixed them on me, and his mouth looked like a closed vice.

'What! satisfied already, sonny?' he asked gently.

'Yes,' I replied in a slightly abashed tone.

'For the present, I suppose. I reckon you'll let me have my revenge some other time, eh?'

'Perhaps.'

'All right. There is my I. O. U. for one thousand five hundred dollars. I'll let you have the spondouloux this evening. You are a lucky young man, and I congratulate you, and hope you'll be as successful on Klondyke when you get there.'

The rest of the company also congratulated me warmly, while the owner of the soft, clear voice, who was a pretty young lady, dressed in a long sealskin jacket and fur cap, also told me how glad she was that I had won so much money, and so quickly.

'It was your indomitable pluck that did it, sir,' she said, looking at me admiringly from her rich, velvety-brown eyes. 'I was so frightened for you when I saw you losing; but you knew better than be afraid, didn't you? I hope you'll also win next time you play with the gentleman.'

Paul drew me to one side, away from this charming young lady and the admiring crowd of adventurers, and when he got me to myself he spoke very seriously to me.

'I hope you will never be tempted into a game like that again, Tom; indeed, into no kind of game with the like of Dan Fairmaner. It was the narrowest squeak ever you had, my boy.'

'Won't I be expected to give him his revenge, Paul?'

'Not if I can save you. He has had revenge enough, for he almost cleared you out before your turn came. You also have had a slice of luck shown to you that comes to very few who fall into Dan's clutches. Be content, for it isn't likely to come again your way.'

'I never gambled before,' I said simply.

'That is perhaps how you came to win. They say that the first game is generally lucky, whatever the after ones may be. Don't do it again.'

'I won't if I can avoid it; but if he should insist on playing me for the money I have won from him?'

'I'll be your proxy in that case. I know Dan Fairmaner, and I also know just about when to stop, which you don't. He is the most ruthless criminal on this ship or anywhere, with about as much human sympathy in him as a fasting tiger.'

'Thank you, Paul, and forgive me my folly. I place myself entirely in your hands,' I said humbly.

'All right, my lad. Then let me give you another word of advice while I am about it. Beware of that sweet young lady who was doing her best to bewitch you when I took you from her side.'

'Do you know her also, Paul?'

'Yes,' answered Paul, grimly. 'Her name is Cora Greenback, one of the smartest products of California, and the confederate of Dan Fairmaner. She has drawn more poor flies into her web than I could name between now and Queen Charlotte Sound.'

'But she pitied me, and said it was a shame to take my money.'

'I heard her utter those words,' answered Paul even more grimly than before.

'And that made you mad to go on, didn't it?'

'Yes, but she was not to know that; besides, she seemed quite delighted at my success.'

'I also listened to that wily speech from the siren. I have heard her say something similar so often before, that it struck me like an old, old song. Then, you take my advice, keep clear of this pretty

decoy and her mate, the spider, if you desire to reach Klondyke and get back to the home of your childhood with any wool upon your back.'

The journey which we had now begun was one of the most splendid that could be imagined. Something similar, but on a grander scale, to the fjords of Norway. We had passed through Haro Straits, with its many islands all thickly timbered, with bold cliffs starting out of the deep waters, and were hugging the lofty shores of Vancouver.

Great snow-covered mountains towered on every side of us, with dense forests covering their rugged sides right up to the glaciers. We were passing along an inland sea, with the waters almost as waveless as a pond.

Yet there was a swift tide helping us along—a tide that increased in speed as we neared Seymour Narrows and Discovery Passage. This was a part of the voyage that we all looked forward to with both interest and anxiety. Our anxiety was natural, for in these narrows whirled the great maelstrom of the Ripple Rock—the Yaculta demon, who sucked in ships and drowned sailors. We had to steam over this fabled monster, and our safety depended upon the moment chosen to do so.

The celebrated Norwegian maelstrom, which lies between the Laffoden Islands, is a mild whirlpool compared to this one when it is roused up to its full fury. The Norway maelstrom only attains a speed of six knots an hour when the westerly gale helps the tide. Six knots is quite speed enough to resist.

But the Yaculta maelstrom races at double this

speed when the ebbing tide rushes in from the Gulf of Georgia. Then the whole gorge is white with foam. Waves leap up and beat furiously. Vast and deep holes are bored in their midst, while they swirl around and send up boiling geysers high into the air. The Ripple Reef bares its knife-like edge in the centre of the pass, and waits to cut in pieces the helpless ships or canoes that have been drawn into the vortex. They stagger and reel and shiver as they come nearer, then they are sucked down with all their cargoes and crews.

The *Saranac* was lost here in 1875. It entered the pass just a little too late. So also the *Wachusett*, and many more hapless ships have found on that whirling eddy a swift and terrible doom.

We entered the rapids, however, on this occasion during the favourable quarter-of-an-hour before the full fury wakes up. The whirlpool was boiling wildly, and the razor-backed Ripple Rock hidden by thirteen feet of water.

As we tore our way over this dangerous passage, at full steam, we watched the strands of floating kelp tossing about the race-way. These are thought by the imaginative Indians to be the pig-tails of the seventy Chinamen who went down with the *Grapples* in 1883.

This steamer caught fire as it entered the narrows, and the rudder ropes were burnt. Then the vessel was past any control, and went careering round, while the frantic passengers leapt overboard into the sucking eddy, and were drawn under. We all breathed more freely when we got past Valders Island.

CHAPTER XIII

A GAME OF POKER

THAT evening at dinner Madam Cora Greenback managed to get a seat alongside of me, and made herself very agreeable.

If I hadn't been warned against her, and by so trustworthy a friend as Paul Ravenwood, I should never have suspected her for being what she was—the decoy of a gambler. She was so frankly affable, without being forward, and so widely read and intelligent, that it seemed unnatural to think of her as being so wicked.

The weather was much too cold for ladies to come in to dinner in the state of undress uniform which they are so fond of doing in more temperate climates. Indeed, furs and eider-down feathers were the prevailing fashion, with as little of the skin exposed as possible. Her face, however, with a little of her neck and throat, was displayed for the gratification of the male passengers. These were lovely, and as soft as the face and neck of a baby. The fresh, frosty wind had deepened the roses in her cheeks, while her lips were as sweetly red as ripe cherries. Her teeth were as white as the snow on the glaciers, and her hair black, glossy, and beautifully perfumed.

I don't exactly recollect how she was dressed, except that there was a lot of white flummeries and creamy-tinted furs about her. She wore a good quantity of jewellery also.

But there was a gentle air of dignity and innocence about her that would have disarmed all my suspicions, had it not been for Paul.

As it was, however, believing in his truth as I had a right to do, I could only regard Madam Greenback as a precious lump of wicked deceit, covered up, like a poisoned bon-bon, in scented and costly wrappings. She looked lovely, she smelt deliciously, but I was perfectly contented with looking at and listening to her liquid words, without desiring any nearer acquaintance with her.

It was impossible for me not to see also that although she spoke mostly to me, her admiration was for handsome Paul Ravenwood. She watched him while turning her face and eyes in my direction—that was how she could see him best—as he sat at the bottom angle of the table. I knew also that she was speaking for his benefit, for she must have known that the books and authors she spoke about could not possibly interest *me*.

What did I care for such humbugs? What's the use of pretending to understand Scotch if you're not a Scotchman? Who could understand such high falutin tommy-rot as most of these fellows cram into their books?

I gave them my plain opinions when I heard this pretty scorpion trying to chuck dust in our eyes, to the delight of Paul, who was glad, I expect, to see that I wasn't infatuated with the siren.

‘Rudyard Kipling, I understand what he writes about, and Mark Twain and Bret Harte, and Hardy and Dumas, and all that sort, for they all write naturally, and don’t try to be too fine or mystical, or cheap-jack prophetic-like; but I wouldn’t give two cents for any of the others you have mentioned, Miss— Miss—’

‘Mrs Brooklin is my name. I expect my husband to meet me at Juneau,’ answered the young lady, smiling sweetly in my direction, and glancing shyly past me at Paul.

‘Excuse me, did I hear you say Brooklin, or— Greenback, madam?’ asked Paul, with a fine air of simple perplexity, yet looking her straight in the face.

‘Brooklin, sir, *née* Greenback,’ replied the young lady, calmly, and then she burst into a merry peal of laughter as she leaned forward, ignoring me altogether now, to speak directly to Paul. ‘Your face is strangely familiar, Mr— Mr—’

‘Paul Ravenwood, at your service, Madam Brooklin.’

‘Thanks. It is a pretty name, but it does not help my faulty memory much. Is there not a *née* in your case also?’

She spoke archly, and Paul laughed gently at her little joke, while he replied indirectly.

‘I guess there are not a few pilgrims to Klondyke arrayed in travelling names, madam. Husbands and other debtors seeking their liberty amongst the snows. Wives putting the glaciers between themselves and their fond hubbies.’

‘There are a considerable number of grass-

widows going on the hunt after their truant hubbies as well as running from them, I guess. I am on that track ; and there's another.'

Madam Cora was not nearly so sweetly gentle as she had been at first. There was a more brassy and less flute-like intonation about her voice.

The lady she pointed out I had already noticed that afternoon. She could not have been older than I was myself, if so old. Her features were pretty and delicate, but sad and pale. Her hair, what I saw of it under her fur cap, which she had not removed, was golden brown. A girl who had fallen on hard lines, even a stranger looking at her would have said. She did not speak much to anyone.

She was too far off to hear what Cora said about her ; besides, at the moment she was listening to the grumbling of one of the miners' wives.

I saw Paul shoot a rapid glance in her direction and then he continued his conversation with Madam Brooklin, *née* Greenback.

Harold Brownlee and Peter Glen didn't trouble themselves greatly over anything except their food. They always tried to be up to time in this necessary ceremony. They both left me to do most of the patter, while they looked after the stowage. Peter, in particular, had a firm belief in the benefit, to a growing lad, of stoking when and where possible. In consequence of this, no one noticed them much except the stewards. They were forced to take notice of these otherwise silent customers.

'Potatoes, steward !' cried Harold, huskily.

'Beans, steward !' echoed Peter.

Already the attentive waiters, seeing where they were likely to be wanted most, began to take up their posts behind those young sea wolves' chairs. If they were called to other portions of the saloon, they quickly returned to this part again with the last dish served in their hands, and their proffer was never declined by any of us three. There would be time enough for self-sacrifice at Klondyke.

After dinner we had a little concert in the saloon, but while the place was being cleared we went on deck for an airing.

Paul promenaded with Madam Brooklin. I had an instinct that he was doing this in order to keep her from tackling me. She also seemed well enough satisfied to have him for her companion instead of me. I think, however, that Dan Fairmaner was not too well pleased at the change of partners. Twice he tried to join them without success, then he retired to a shady corner of the deck to smoke his cigar and watch them.

I will say, also, that, with all her faults, she did not act spitefully or mean towards me, for she introduced me to the pale-faced young lady, and so gave me what I liked now more than anything else—a good and gentle lady to talk to and walk with.

Mrs Walters was her married name. Winifred her maiden name. We soon got to be great friends. I expect she thought that she would be much safer with a lad of my age than taking up with the other reckless and rough diggers.

We were not long together before we had ex-

changed confidences. Hers was a pretty hard life even although she told about it shortly and without much emotion.

Married only a few months to a fellow in San Francisco, who had got into trouble with his employers and bolted, leaving her in the lurch. He had written to tell her he was off to the new diggings, and that she was to follow him by the next boat. He had promised to wait for her at Juneau, as Madam Brooklin said her husband was also doing. The poor young thing had sold up everything and paid for her passage, leaving her future in the hands of Providence.

I felt sorry for her, more sorry than I had ever been for anyone in my life before. I admired her pluck also, and I told her I should act like a brother towards her, and help her to find her husband, if possible. All this before we had been on deck more than half-an-hour.

The night was bracing and quiet. The stars perfectly clustering overhead as the steamer ploughed its way through the smooth fjord, with the beetling cliffs rising round us, and the snow-covered peaks shining against the blue-black sky.

The waves through which we went plunging were all glowing and gleaming with blue phosphorus, such as one notices in the tropics, only they were more so here. In the tropic waters the phosphorus only gleams out when the waves clash together or divide from the vessel, but here the whole sea seemed to be ablaze, as if lighted spirits of wine were floating on the surface. It was beautiful, and made the heart thrill with its awfulness.

I took a hand in the concert, and gave them some sentimental sea ditties. Dan Fairmaner played on his own violin the accompaniment, and I must say that he played nearly as well as I have heard that instrument played anywhere. It was quite easy to sing while he followed and filled in the pauses with such smart flourishes, quavers, demi- and semi-demi-quavers, etc., etc. We had wild and enthusiastic applause, and, I think, retired very well pleased with our efforts. Madame Cora sang also. The most splendid contralto voice she had, that fairly filled the whole ship with husky melody. If she wasn't a professional, she ought to have been. Never had I listened to such a voice even on the platforms of the best concert-halls in London.

I think, had I not been warned by Paul of what a bad one this young female was, I could almost have worshipped her for that voice. It went straight to my heart, and seemed to pluck it out and tear it into pieces, yet so softly, that there was more pleasure than pain in the tearing. It came straight out of her little mouth, that voice, as if she had only opened it a little, to let the sound come from a choir of angels inside, and it spread and spread until there was no room left on the ship for anything except sobs.

Perhaps the fine, clear, frosty air helped us somewhat, but after she sang 'A che La Mort,' and 'Auld Robin Gray,' there was hardly a dry face left amongst us.

Dan Fairmaner excelled himself also when playing to her. Her soft, brown eyes burned as she

looked at the ceiling, and his black ones were swimming with sentimental tears as he looked at the lamp. If I hadn't experienced his skill and heard about her badness, I'd have given myself straight away to them both.

Paul Ravenwood was the only one amongst us who seemed to resist the fascination. He sat looking at them both gravely, with his beard and moustache covered by his hand. His keen, grey eyes were dry and hard, and the upper part of his face like a fixed mask.

After the concert was over and the gentlemen had taken a few drinks, Dan came over to where I was sitting with Paul, and proposed paying me what he was due if I'd come to his cabin.

'Or,' he said, casually, 'if you care to give me my revenge, before we settle up, I'm your man, either with cards or toss.'

'Go toss,' whispered Madame Brooklin, as she slid into the chair next to me. I am just starving to see you winning some more money from that sport.'

I glanced towards Paul helplessly, and he spoke up.

'My young partner here don't know much about cards, while pitch and toss is what I call a deck game. If you don't mind, I'll take his place as a partner should, and give you your revenge. Agreeable, stranger?'

Dan looked ugly at him for a moment, but the company deciding it was a fair offer, he consented.

'Well, I m willing—what is it to be?'

'What you please,' replied Paul easily.

'Two-handed poker, then, for twenty dollars a game.'

'Make it fifty, and we can be through the cards sooner, so as to give someone else a show.'

'Right you are,' cried Dan loudly.

'Steward, a fresh pack, if you please.'

It was going to be a big game, and to prevent any after disputes, a committee was appointed to search carefully the players. Then when the committee were satisfied, the combatants sat down in their shirt sleeves, with the cuffs rolled over the elbows.

A fair game it was also, for old gamblers were watching each side very closely. Madame Cora, when she saw all these preparations, gave a big sigh and went over to talk to Mrs Winifred Walters.

Silently the two men played, except at such times as they tried to bluff each other. As I looked on the bared arms I was astonished to see how muscular and well-developed Dan Fafrmaner was. He appeared a skinny youth with his coat on, but a compact athlete when it was off. I no longer doubted the stories I had heard that day about his crack abilities with his fists and shooter. He had muscles of tempered steel.

Neither tasted liquor all the time the game lasted. They lost or won also with the same air of superb indifference. They were thoroughly well matched.

At the end of a most engrossing hour both threw down their cards and called for drinks. They had played to their mutual satisfaction

Then they summed up and Paul rose the winner of eight thousand dollars from his antagonist.

'Shake, pard,' said Dan, holding out his small, well-shaped hand. 'You are the smartest man I have yet met this side of Californy.'

Paul looked at the outstretched hand a moment absently, then he suddenly put out his strong hand and took it.

'Why not?' I heard him mutter to himself. 'He's only what the Fates have made him.'

'What's that?' asked the other quickly.

'Nothing,' answered Paul quietly. 'I was only thinking.'

'Thank you. Now excuse me while I fetch my bag and square off our little business.'

'There's no need to trouble about that to-night. I can trust you, Dan Fairmaner.'

'I daresay, but I like to handle the coins when I win, and also pay out when I lose as quickly as possible, so that I may sleep and forget it.'

'As you please.'

While Dan went to his cabin, Madame Cora approached Paul and said, as she leaned over his shoulder,—

'Now, sir, will you favour me with your *née*?'

Paul drew her ear down to his mouth and whispered something in it. She started as she listened and burst out laughing.

'Oh my! And poor Dan sat down to play cards with *you*. Won't he just tear out his remaining trusses when he knows what a tenderfoot he has been.'

CHAPTER XIV

WE REACH DYEA

WHATEVER Paul had whispered in the ear of Madame Brooklin, it made her wonderfully attentive and respectful to him. Next day also when we again saw Dan Fairmaner, he looked at Paul with an air of the most profound admiration. He had paid his money the night before with perfect and philosophic *sang froid*.

'I reckon, sir, that you did me an honour last night,' he said next day as we met on deck before breakfast. 'I do wish, however, that I had known who was giving me such a valuable and instructive lesson. I'd have watched more closely than I did.'

'It is some time since I handled the pasteboards, therefore I felt a bit awkward,' answered Paul modestly.

'No, sir! I was quite satisfied with your playing, indeed. While you were raking in my shekels I was just wondering at what college you had been educated. Of course, it did not occur to me who you were, as I knew you had quitted the profession, and been converted to religion.'

'Yes, I have given up card-playing either as an amusement or as an occupation; nor would I have played last night, except as proxy for my young

friend. I trust you are satisfied, Dan Fairmaner?’

‘Perfectly, Buck—’

‘Paul Ravenwood is my real name, the other was only a *nom de guerre*, which I wish to forget.’

Dan bowed politely, and changed the subject.

This decided victory was the subject of a good deal of talk amongst the passengers, and I doubt if Paul could have induced any of them to play with him had he been that way disposed. The man who could lift so much money out of Dan Fairmaner at one sitting was much too smart a man for them to tackle.

He did not attempt to explain his actions, or reveal the past to them, and I was too deeply obliged to him to do any prying into his secrets. Afterwards, when we were better acquainted, he told me, with the reason why he had taken so much from Dan.

We were passing through not only some of the most sublime, but also the most exquisitely-tinted scenery in the world.

From Queen Charlotte’s Sound to Dixon Entrance, we went through a thick curtain of white and moist atmosphere, which was warmed by the Kuro Siwo current that flows here with full and genial strength.

From the ocean the warm air rose and forced vegetation, the perpetual moistness making it vividly green. The snowy hills above congealed these moistures into filmy clouds of mist, that rolled and trailed their cobwebby streamers.

We rushed into the mist-band which clung to the ocean face. Above us the sun was sparkling

on the funnel and mast tops. On the sides of the cliffs hung mosses, ferns and bushes like emeralds. In the waters swung the richest-coloured seaweed in lavish profusion, amongst which fish of all kinds literally swarmed. It was the ideal home of the mermaids and their companions, the human-headed walruses.

It was not difficult to imagine all sorts of mythical and ideal things, as we steamed over these smooth waters, that doubled each object reflected on them. The moving mist round us now blanking out everything, now revealing some loveliness vaguely and for a moment or so giving us glimpses of dazzling beauty, to be again enveloped in that soft white veil.

Cascades foaming down the granite rocks from the glaciers far above. Forests so choked up with a tangle of undergrowth and parasites that the axe only could clear a way. Sea birds clustering and soaring by myriads. Streams of brightest greens, vivid purples, dazzling whites, silver greys, richest bronzes, and subdued olives from the ferns, the heather and the young leaves blending with the sear. At portions the cliffs rise straight up for fifteen hundred feet, while snow-covered ridges tower above these twice that distance. Trees of all sorts cling to those cliffs like vines, and waterfalls pour down behind their gnarled limbs. It is all most perfect in the artistic sense.

Greenville Channel is a wonderfully impressive fjord. For forty-five miles it cuts the mainland and Pitt Island without a bend or a break. With lofty walls on each side, and mirror-like waters

below, the loud echoes rolled away, and repeated each sound.

Our next stop after Tongas was Port Wrangel, but as the steamer was chartered to carry passengers quickly on, and no one wanted to land anywhere before reaching Juneau, we only paused to take on fuel, and then we pushed along. At Wrangel we left the mild climate which we had experienced from Queen Charlotte's Sound, and began to get a sniff of the glacier land of Alaska.

Along the Narrows, at parts no wider than a hundred yards, we slid, watching the magic effects from the rising sun on the rocks and the spruces festooned with the pale-green mosses. Watching the fronds, stems and orange heads of the giant kelp floating on the intensely green waves.

The hour of our separation was now drawing close at hand, for we were getting close to Juneau. The Devil's Thumb was looming darkly up, eight thousand six hundred feet above the level of the sea, and pointing out the first of the great glaciers of Alaska that we had seen. After this, however, we saw plenty of ice rivers, with their crevices, morraines, and cast-off bergs.

It is impossible to exist on board a ship, even for four days, without getting intimately acquainted with the most of your companions. Amongst Englishmen this is even so, but amongst Americans and cosmopolitans the intimacy comes quicker and more complete.

I do not mean to say that every man and woman told all their private notions to each other. Doubtless a great many of them were imaginative

romances that they told so candidly. But we knew each other as we wished to be known if we met again on the goldfields, and that was quite enough. Some, I daresay, were travelling incog. for reasons of their own; they may have been princes and princesses in disguise. They were all very good company, and that they were prepared to face and endure the fearful cold and possible starvation, with the thousand other dangers and privations yet before us, gained them every claim to our respect and friendship.

The language was by no means over-refined that was used by some and condoned by the others. Many of the men had not been in the company of women so long a time as this for years; therefore they had lost the perception of discriminating between the adjectives that might be excused and those that were uncondonable.

But as bad language was not an indictable offence, open correction was not to be thought of, as that would have caused a riot and bloodshed.

Paul did all that he could do, by good-natured chaff, or quiet and private remonstrance. He had given the miners one practical lesson on the folly of gambling with experts, and when they saw that he only played that one game, they promptly christened him 'The Converted Sport.'

He cured, or at least greatly modified, the free use of a highly-tinted adjective, by reciting to them a poem, which went after this fashion:—

‘ There was once a carmine butcher,
Who killed a carmine sheep,
And all the carminy carmine
Ran down the carmine street.’

He wasn't allowed to proceed farther with that doggerel than the first verse. A committee was formed, and the unnecessary use of the superlative adjective 'carmine' was made finable 'one dollar' while on board.

They are great at forming committees in America. If a strong man quietly but firmly insists about any reform, a committee will form and discuss the advisability of lynching him, or supporting his idea.

Paul was a strong man physically. His moral strength and influence over his shipmates greatly consisted in the fact that he was no canting tenderfoot, but one who had experienced life as they knew it.

At Juneau, while the steamer was delivering cargo, we all trooped ashore, some to stay here for a time in order to purchase outfits, wait for friends who had missed this boat, or until the spring had advanced a little more.

It was the beginning of April now, and still very cold and bleak. The winter snows were as yet undisturbed on the ranges, while, in the valleys, they were beginning to rot and become quagmires.

My poor young friend Mrs Walters was in a condition of despair. Her husband had left a letter for her at Juneau, telling her to follow as best she could, for he had gone on ahead, having got an offer as a grub-stake partner with another man.

Paul almost swore when he read that callous and red-Indian-like message to this forlorn young wife. A man might get a grub-stake job, but how could a delicate girl?

'Well, and what are you going to do, Mrs Walters?'

'Go on, even although I die by the way. It was cruel of Fred not to wait, but perhaps he could not help himself.'

'Just as I expected you would do, my dear—go on, whether it is possible or not. Well, as I reckon we are all going the same way, do you care to trust yourself with us as grub-stake partner also as far as Dawson City—you to look after our patching and that sort of thing—are you agreeable, Mrs Walters, for I think my mates would not like to see you left behind?'

Thus the bargains were struck, and we set to work to purchase an outfit for our new companion.

'I should like to overtake Mr Fred Walters,' remarked Paul to us after we had seen the poor young thing safe to the hotel, 'just to tell him what I think of his conduct.'

'Won't she be an awful responsibility?' asked Harold Brownlee.

'I think not, sonnie. You strong young men are apt to underrate the endurance and staying-power of those poor weak females. She is most likely to die if someone don't help her along, and it's useless to think about turning her back. There are hosts of strong men will be turned back by the dangers ahead, but I doubt if many women will so far lose sight of Klondyke. I am much mistaken in character if this slender girl will give us any more trouble than a man would.'

We found Juneau a busy town, crowded, at this time, with adventurers of every nationality.

Many were stranded here for want of capital to carry them farther on; others, frightened at the

accounts of the bad state of the passes, were waiting until the snow cleared off the trail. It had plenty of drinking and gambling saloons, and also had places of amusement, and good hotels, that is, the accommodation and food were comfortable and well cooked at those places. The charges were moderate also for such a far-distant township. On Douglas Island stands the largest quartz crushing mill in the world.

There was plenty of provisions of all kinds here, with fresh beef and fish. The Indians hold an open market daily here, and altogether, with the feuds and lawlessness of a frontier town and the moving population, it was an exceedingly lively place.

We had laid in our fresh stock, and, clad in our arctic clothing, we looked more like polar bears or Esquimaux than white people when we next went on board the steamer with our new mate Mrs Walters. Although deeply disappointed at her husband's desertion, she showed a great deal more grit than any of us, with the exception of Paul, would have expected from her.

She was no longer so melancholy as she had been when I first met her. I expect she had never been over sure about her husband waiting for her at Juneau, although he had promised he would. This gave to her the kind of appearance of a cat without a home, or a dog on its own hook. Women never appear to advantage when in this position any more than the cat and dog do.

She was a Californian girl, and not too much of a lady. I mean by this that she had been brought

up in an ordinary way without too many luxuries, therefore she was the more easily pleased with her present surroundings and satisfied to make herself generally useful.

She began to be quite cheerful and chummy with us boys, only keeping up a great respect, as we all did, for big Paul. She felt safe now about getting to Klondyke if we did; even to die in company seems better to some people than to be left behind.

We dropped Dan Fairman and Madame Brooklin at Juneau with more than a third of our other passengers, so that having a prior claim we got the vacated bunks. More passengers came on with their traps and filled the steamer chock-a-block.

We had said good-bye to comfort when we left Juneau. There was an icy and fierce wind blowing down the channel that raised the waves and at times dashed them over us with pitiless chill. On deck it was hardly possible to stand, while down below it was suffocating with the crowd of non-descripts. We all wished most fervently that this latter part of our sea-voyage was over.

'There is but one thing to do, in the face of a blast like this, and that is to keep our blood in circulation,' said Paul. 'Let us move.'

We moved as well as we could through the crowd of shivering and chattering humanity, while the steamer fought her way in the teeth of that inland gale. It was blowing straight down upon us from the inhospitable Yukon and giving us a very chilly welcome.

What it would be like when we got to Dyea

and attempted the dreaded passes, none of us liked to think about. Dyea was not like Juneau. There were no friendly hotels to shelter us, only the barest accommodation, if we were lucky enough not to find all the sheds filled up.

Paul gave us his reasons for wishing to push on as quickly as possible, and we saw how right he was as soon as we reached the landing-place. His reasons were, that already Dyea was over-crowded, and that in another week or two it would be impossible to secure Indians for love or money.

The trail also would be easier traversed with snow on it than if bare. As for the cold, we must get used to that, and the sooner the better.

At last, after a day and a night's beating through the fury of that blizzard, we reached our destination amid a blinding whirl of snow.

CHAPTER XV

IN CAMP AT DYEA

WE had been scrambling and crushing for our places at table all the way up, with the appetites of hungry wolves to help us in the fight.

There had been no loss of temper over this business, at least no more than sometimes happens outside a theatre on first nights. We were all famishing, and always ready for our meals long before they were ready for us. The air of America makes people hungry and impatient to cure that natural disease. In British Columbia and Alaska this disease seizes one like a cholera, and must be attended to as promptly, or it is apt to cause sudden death—to the dilatory caterer or unfortunate waiter.

Yet considering the internal conditions at such times, the voyagers had been, nearly all, wondrous polite to the women folks who were travelling with them. Some of these ladies may not have been very bright specimens of womanhood, in its gentle and true phases, but they must all have been plucky to have ventured so far in search of adventure. The coarsest and most brutalized of the men felt this, I suppose, which accounted for the chivalry that was exhibited on board. When a woman was good she was treated like a saint, and

not a man there but would have cheerfully committed murder to protect such a one from insult. They were rough boys, but they were not skunks nor cowards.

It did not surprise anyone that Mrs Walters had placed herself under our protection. Decorum could not be studied overmuch in Alaska, any more than it might on a raft in mid-ocean. They all knew that she was safe with us, as indeed she would have been with any of the gang who were pressing forward.

One passion and one dream dominated every breast to the exclusion of other vices, and that was gold. They were brothers and sisters all in this one engrossing aim, this one mad rush and fever.

Yet Dyea was a dreary spot to get stranded upon. A lonely valley of quagmires, quicksands and rugged boulders, covered with ice and snow, with only a few starved, distorted, and dwarfed saplings growing, or rather perishing amongst the ruins, and a background of stern and forbidding granite precipices.

On the banks of the promontory were piled the snow-covered and ice-glued mounds of packages, which former adventurers had not yet the means nor pluck to remove and arrange.

On such places as they could find secure, or so far firm ground, tents had been erected, at the entrance and as far up the valley as one could see. Here the miserable frost-bitten and frost-bound were lingering and consuming such of their provisions as they could extricate from those ever-growing mounds. We had a hundred and fifty

different packages as our stock, to transport as best we could up through the desolate passes, and other dangers of that long and dreadful journey, before we reached the regions where other privations waited for us—and all for gold.

Yet not for quite that alone. Winifred Walters was going, because she felt it to be her duty to follow the man whom she had sworn to love, honour and obey; the man who had sworn to love and protect her, but who had so quickly perjured himself. We were going for the sake of adventure as well as the hope to find what we thought would gain us the world's respect. What our good friend Paul was going after was not quite so clear to any of us. Yet I don't think it was altogether for gold. It was a wild scramble ashore for the lot of us, as well as such hard work, that the unloading of a vessel was child's play compared with it.

We had to hire a scow and wait our turn to get it, as there were only three or four of them, and everyone was in a hurry to land and get up his tent, all this in the full face of that snowstorm.

Then, after we had loaded our scow, we had to pull it through the shallow waters and ice, and carry each article on our backs through the waist-deep sludge and deposit it on the safest spot we could find. It took us six journeys from the steamer to the shore, and on the last trip Paul carried Winifred in his arms and landed her safely, much to her disgust.

'There now, don't go treating me like a bale of provisions, Paul,' she said, when he set her down. 'I've got trousers and boots on the same as you, and

I can quite as easily take to the mud. I declare I'm the only clean fellow in Dyea.'

'Ah! you'll get dirty fast enough,' Paul answered easily. 'There won't be much washing this side of Klondyke, and from what I hear, not much there either, so be content to begin this journey a little tidy.'

The next operation of this eventful day was to bargain for sledges, and pull our baggage for about three miles inland to the only part left vacant and sheltered. A few spare trees were clustered here, about the size of bushes, and the thickness round the trunk of a man's wrist. Miserable-looking scrub it was, but we managed to light a fire with some of it, after we had fixed our tent. Then we set up our store, and melting some of the snow, we resigned ourselves to the tender mercies of Winifred.

We had reason to thank our stars that our comrade was only an ordinary girl that night, who had learned to cook instead of mastering French and crotchet. Our supper was something to dream about, and we ate enough to give us all a bad nightmare in any other part of the world than Alaska. Talk about the gorging of the redskins, I think we must have taken the cake. Then, tucking ourselves in, we lay down and slept like logs.

The following morning we were up as soon as daylight appeared, and, with our shovels, hard at work clearing the snow from our tent stores. It had fallen heavily during the day and most of the night, and drifted, in places eight, ten and twelve feet in depth. Fortunately, however, we were on

the sheltered side of an immense boulder, so that we were not so badly off as we might have been.

The blizzard was still blowing furiously from the north, and freezing the snow hard where it had settled, but the snow, for the time at least, had ceased to fall. It was so piercingly cold that I cannot describe it, or convey its intensity by any comparison. Our glass, however, only registered it at ten degrees below zero, but that was in the shelter. In the teeth of the gale it must have been lower several degrees.

Yet we had passed the night comfortably enough inside our rubber bags and furs. It was only when we first got out of them, and faced the outside, that we began to think tenderly about home, sweet home.

Work was the only thing to keep us all alive in this Arctic blast, and the harder the work the better.

I need not inform you that no man nor woman in that valley would be so mad as to take off a single article of clothing when they crept into bed, or rather into their individual bags. We had rigged ourselves up for the journey, and, muddy or clean, damp or dry, we kept them all on constantly.

What a picture of desolation the morning light presented to us as we looked round—a dull, leaden-tinted sky that seemed to press upon the dazzling white ridges and peaks, which towered above us. A uniform white sheet spread over all the earth, over which appeared dark spots and patches; these were the camps, tents and baggage of the newcomers, from which the snow had been cleared.

They were all working desperately to dig themselves out of the drift.

Some had lighted their fires behind the shelter of rocks, and were preparing breakfast, others were passing to and from the storehouses and hotel. It was like the camp of a Cossack army.

Leaving Peter Glen to help Winifred with the breakfast-making, Harold and I accompanied Paul to the hotel, so that we could make arrangements for getting on with as little delay as possible. We found the place crammed to the door with visitors and inquirers like ourselves, all eager to get on, and most of them using bad language because there seemed no present chance of doing so.

Those who had not taken the precautions we had, of providing themselves with sledges, might have to wait for weeks, as the hireable ones were all in use. The Indians also were all out on the trail, while everything was in a state of confusion and chaos.

Many had resigned themselves to their fate, and now sat drinking away their money, and cursing this El Dorado as a monster fraud. They were selling their stores, rather than attempt to pay the heavy duty and expenses which the moving on entailed. Nearly every day summary executions took place on starved and broken wretches, who had pilfered provisions in their desperation. In this way deaths from actual starvation were less frequent than deaths from bullet wounds. There was no room for charity and benevolence in the hearts of the survivors. The most prudent had only sufficient for their own stern necessity, and to give

or lend in such a land meant to sign the philanthropic fool's own death warrant. There were dark stories told even here of tragedies which had taken place on the route up—men who had lost everything, and been forced to imitate the tactics of the cannibals and shipwrecked sailors in order to keep their own miserable lives.

They told us that the passes were blocked up with travellers and their baggage, so that it was impossible for any newcomer with a load to get over the trail. All sorts of horrors were poured into our ears by those who, losing heart, now sat and drank while they waited on death.

Paul listened gravely to those ominous tales, but they did not appear to move him much. He made his inquiries and arrangements calmly and resolutely.

'We must drag our three tons and a quarter up the pass ourselves, lads,' he said coolly, when he saw how utterly impossible it was to get any assistance. 'This icy blizzard will have frozen the swamps and snows, but as a day of thaw will make it impossible for us to proceed, I propose we take advantage of the frost and move on as fast as possible from this valley of despair.'

We were fighting our way along in the strength of the blizzard towards our tent when he shouted these remarks, therefore did not attempt to reply until we got into shelter. Then over our breakfast of bacon, biscuit and coffee we discussed the situation.

We agreed with him that there was no use wasting our time at Dyea. A week of the miserable

company there would rob us of all the pluck and energy we still had. It was best to be up and doing. But not while the full force of that blizzard, lasted, for we could not have pulled empty sledges, far less our heavy loads against such a tempest.

That afternoon we paid the last heavy taxation on our goods.. They had been already taxed and weighed so often that the commissioners took the American estimate of weight for granted, and, on our payment of this fee, declared we were at liberty to carry in our stock without further impost. We should now have the portage over the summit to pay, if we could get so far. That would be about fifty to eighty dollars, according to the condition of the summit when we reached its base. If, however, we stuck on the way, we should have to make the best contract we could.

The wind-storm raged the whole of that day with unabated fury, which kept us inside our tent most of the time. We were all jolly enough and had some games, such as blind man's buff and things of that sort. Winifred was getting as rosy-looking and almost as rough as the rest of us, with the exertion and the healthy, if cold, air. In the afternoon the wind shifted a bit round towards the east and became slightly milder. Then, while Paul went to make some more inquiries, we all went outside and had a game of football.

That warmed us up properly, and gave us a gigantic appetite as well. As we looked on what we had already demolished since we had landed the big providing of Paul did not seem too much for a year.

Paul had been more lucky this afternoon than he expected, for he brought back a dozen of strong dogs, with their Indian owner. They had come in that afternoon, and Paul had hired them, regardless of expense.

That night we held a party in our tent with some of our shipmates, who were camped near us, and then, as the wind was set fair, the next morning we struck our tent and began our land journey.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE CHILKOOT PASS

WE set out in good spirits, for the snow was firm under foot, and the wind now almost at our backs, and for that region, not blowing too hard. The unsuccessful adventurers saw us depart with mingled feelings of regret and envy; many, I expect, wished themselves as well equipped, or could start away on such a favourable day.

Our Indian was taciturn, like the rest of his tribe, uncommonly ugly and unmistakably dirty. It is doubtful if he had ever indulged in a wash during the whole course of his life, certainly he had never once removed his clothes since first they were tanned and new, and that must have been a long, long time before from the odour that he diffused around.

Paul was lucky in securing his services, however; for although his charges were most exorbitant, yet he was faithful for the time to his employer and as careful as an Indian can be over the goods under his charge. He was also one of the headmen amongst the portion of the Chilkat Indians, who acted as porters up the Chilkoot or Taiya Pass, therefore he was better able to command the services of these necessary evils than even the white contractors.

It was a hard march, even with the decided advantages of good dogs, a fair wind and firm footing, up this twelve miles of stunted forest, before we reached the mouth of the canyon. What it would be like in wet weather, when the snow was changed to mire, made us shudder to think about. Several of the adventurers at Dyea had told us that the White Pass was an easier trail than the one we were taking, and shorter as well as safer, but that the proprietors of it exacted a heavy fee for letting people use it.

This might not have deterred us had we been able to get to Skagway Bay without waiting. As we could not, we decided to go by the best known and most tortuous trail.

The dogs were a splendid help to us, however, for they were both surefooted and strong, as well as docile, being well trained to the work. We fastened four dogs to each of our three large sledges, and while we three boys pushed behind, Paul, the Indian and Winifred walked in front leading them along.

Up to the mouth of the canyon the way was pretty clear, as far as traffic was concerned, after we had got a mile or so off the camp. True, we met several miners returning in a terribly emaciated condition: they had lost or abandoned their baggage. Some, possibly, had attempted to penetrate the pass in light marching order, and were now coming down to Dyea to beg, steal or starve. They passed us with gloomy looks and with the dragging steps of men who had abandoned hope.

We were always on the ascent, or if we came to slight depressions they did not count in that

general rough rise. Over boulders, stumps of trees and hillocks, the sledges were drawn, while we trudged over powdery snow that came, in parts, up to our knees. A singular sight we all were, with our furs making us abnormally squat and stout-looking, and our blue snow glasses on. Winifred looked just like an ugly fat boy as she stamped along cheerfully in front behind Paul and the Indian.

It was about one o'clock when we reached the canyon, and as we had still some hours of daylight before us, we pushed on after a very short rest, and got to Sheep Camp by nightfall.

We had passed several weird and suggestive sights during that afternoon. Ominous-looking mounds, some wholly, some only partially, covered by the snow. Dead horses, with the skeletons of former travellers, lined the way, also a great number of packages—some piled up ready for transporting, and others scattered about and broken open. If the overland passage to Klondyke was lined in this gruesome fashion, we were not likely to lose our way. It was like the line of a retreating army.

At Sheep Camp there were over a hundred miners bivouacked, several having their wives with them. These had not been able to advance so quickly as we had so far done, many being compelled to carry their baggage by slow degrees on their backs, cache what they could not carry, and return, time after time, for the remainder. In this way a couple or three miles' advance meant sometimes forty miles of hard walking and carrying. They were going along like snails, in spite of their impatience.



Towards morning the wind began blowing another tornado.

The scenery was magnificent, however, on both sides of the pass, lofty banks sloping up from the bed of the frozen torrent, great cliffs towering above these, and, high above all, delicately-tinted glaciers.

As we lay that night under our tent, all tired out with our heavy climbing, we listened to the distant thundering of falling avalanches. These were ominous sounds, warning us of an approaching change in the weather.

We had done well that day, thanks to our dogs and Indian, and if we could get another good frosty day, without much wind, we would be able to surmount the dreaded summit.

Towards morning the wind veered round to the south-west, and began blowing another tornado, this time accompanied by drenching rains, mixed with spiky sleet and slushing snow. The snow became moist, and melted under us where we lay, causing us to sink several inches into it.

Hitherto we had not experienced too much difficulty, but we had now the hardest pull of the pass to encounter. If the ice melted under us we would have to take to the mountain sides and carry our packages, as most of the other adventurers were doing, for we had been walking up the bed of the frozen torrent.

Yes. Before morning broke, the thaw had made rapid strides, and our present position had almost become untenable. The snow was rotting under us swiftly, and the surface had become soft slush. We would have to shift quickly in order to save our lives. It is these swift and tremendous changes

which make the Alaskan passes so dangerous. It was a thaw, yet one which felt ten times colder and more penetrating than the dry frost.

However, our Indian was equal to the emergency. Long before daylight he had gone forward to get assistance, and by the time we woke to find out how exceedingly uncomfortable things were, there he was with a dozen of his tawny brethren ready to help us with our burden.

Striking the camp quickly we moved on to firmer ground as most of the others were doing. There we all had a hasty breakfast of tinned meat, biscuit and coffee, above the timber line, with the wind shrieking and whirling about us as furiously as ever I had heard or felt it at Cape Horn.

The Indians asked us if we would go on or wait for the hurricane to pass. Most people would have waited, for the loosened snow was tumbling over the cliffs, and high above us a heavy fog lay over and buried the summit; but we had braved the anger of the ocean, and what redskins could stand we weren't going to hedge, if our she-mate, Winifred, was game to face it.

She settled the matter quickly by shouting in her clear voice, 'Excelsior!' and so on, or rather up, we decided to go. Until we got down to the shores of Lake Lindemann no spot could be either safe or comfortable.

The Indians and the dogs took charge of the cargo and sledges. They could drag and carry burdens up those crags and icy ledges where no white fellow could.

Before we started, however, we made a chain

gang of ourselves, with Paul as the leader and Winifred bringing up the rear. Thus we became like a big caterpillar with twenty legs, for most of the time we were climbing and creeping on our hands and knees.

It was a mighty stiff, as well as a mighty long, climb up before we reached the base of the summit ; but what cannot sailors do in the way of climbing ?

There was no danger of losing the trail, unless the fog came down too densely, for so many had gone up that it was trampled broad enough.

The danger lay in being blown over the cliffs into some snow-drift and buried, but this the ropes round us would prevent unless we all went.

Zig-zag we wound our way up, gripping hold of ledges and pulling ourselves over them. It was cold, yes, and damp, likewise rainy, at the start. After a bit, however, the rain changed to sleet, that struck our backs like small pebbles ; that again gave way to snow that stuck to us like mud.

Winifred was next to me, so that I was able to look after her and help her over the worst parts. Her face glowed like roses, while she panted with the heavy exertion, yet she went on as bravely as any boy could have done. She never asked for a rest until we were ready for one also. Paul, however, thought about her strength, for he paused and rested often, and when he did we all had.

Sometimes, also, when turning an angle, the blizzard caught us so savagely that we had to hang on for all that we were worth, to prevent us being swept clean away. Sometimes it pinned us flat against the ice. We never could be sure where it

was coming from next. It swirled and shrieked and tore round so wildly.

Temper is everything when people have hardships like this to tackle. Winifred was a rare good-tempered girl, who could raise a laugh out of anything almost. When we were caught she hung on like a cat, and as soon as she could get her breath again she cheered us all with her bursts of merry laughter.

We were drenched in perspiration by the time we stood under the crest of the pass, and were glad to lie down, even upon the snow, and rest for a while. For the past six hours we had been struggling up a height as steep as the side of a house, only broken up by boulders and slippery crags. The actual distance we had advanced during those six hours of hard toil and peril had not been more than three miles, as the crow flies, from where we started at early morning. But as we were forced to make detours round cliffs and along sloping ledges, we might safely reckon that we had crawled and climbed double that distance.

Below us lay the pass, half obscured by the driving snow and sleet, while above us towered what appeared to be a solid wall of granite barring further progress. Its crest was hidden in a cloud of wind-tossed mist, but we knew already its height, more than a thousand feet from where we lay, and over that we had to climb.

We could not see the glaciers, with their deep and wide crevasses that spread all round us, any more than we could look down the pass at our feet; but we could hear the occasional crashing of countless

tons of ice and snow, even through the deafening shriek of that blizzard, and it sounded awful.

Slowly but surely the Indians were creeping after us with our heavy packages on their backs. The first comer brought a large bundle of firewood with him, and the second carried our tent and some provisions. The pass was but thinly wooded in its most sheltered portions, but we were now high beyond where any trees or brushwood could grow.

Great boulders stood round us out of the snow ; for these we were thankful as they gave us some kind of shelter from the fury of that pitiless gale. It always blew half a gale up here, and harder on the summit. What, however, we were also glad of was that the snow was hard and firm under our feet.

By-and-by the two Indians reached us and helped us to fix our tent and build our fire, while the others were piling our goods at the foot of the precipice. We were alone on this afternoon, as no other company had dared to venture so far that day.

‘After toil comes rest,’ cried Winifred, as we stretched ourselves out on our blankets when dinner was over. We had boiled the last of our fresh meat that day, of which the Indians had also partaken, and were feeling too comfortable to care for much exertion. There was no danger of the snow melting here, nor of rain falling either. It might be rain down in the pass ; up here it became ice spikes and snow.

But we were well sheltered by the rocks and our

good tent, therefore could afford to jest over what was past.

There was no moving that day, for the Indians had only brought up about a third of our goods ; therefore, while they went down again for the remainder, we stuck to our shelter and made ourselves happy—telling stories, singing songs and asking conundrums.

Winifred was now showing herself—as she must have been before her short and wretched marriage—a light-hearted, merry girl, full of fun. Now that we saw how well she could endure fatigue and work, we were all glad of her company. Even Harold Brownlee, who cared the least for the society of girls, showed that he was pleased.

She wasn't the least bit in our way, as she might have been if she had been a puling miss ; nor did she go about sighing and pining for her absent husband ; indeed, we all felt that she was much happier along with us than she could have been with him on such a journey. Paul was such a strong, hard-headed and protecting sort of fellow to us all, and so particular about every item, that I'm sure she must have felt as safe as if with her own father and brothers.

He carried a Bible with him always, and at nights, before we turned in, he would light the candle and choose a chapter, which he made us read verse about ; then he would give us a bit of a sermon about it, or ask us questions, chucking in a lot of good, sensible advice and proverbs, and finish all up by a prayer of thanks for our safety

so far, and asking the Almighty to watch over us in the future.

He was a real good man, for all his peculiarities and acted up to what he preached. I won't go so far as to say that he would have pleased everyone with his notions, but we believed in his genuineness and goodness, as we had every cause to do so. I will likewise say that it is wonderful how much more comfortable one can go to sleep, even while a blizzard is blowing, and on the side of a snowy mountain, after asking God to look after you.

That night the sky cleared and the moon came out beautiful. Then we could see, away over the rocky sides of the pass, the distant mountain peaks and glaciers all glittering under that pale light. It was very lonely and solemn and grand.

The precipice over which we had to climb shone up also with all its black fissures and snow-covered ledges and shelves, giving us something to think about ere we fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

OUR CAMP AT LAKE BENNETT

WE could not possibly have had a better morning for crossing the Chilkoot summit than we had, and when on the top what a magnificent panorama spread out before us.

I'll not say that the scrambling up wasn't something to try even the nerves, as well as gripping powers of a sailor, for it was. One cannot mount a thousand feet of slippery ice with the temperature any number of degrees below zero, and a keen wind blowing things about, without feeling glad when the job was over.

We three boys beat Paul hollow at this final game of climb, and had to help both him and Winifred up.

The way we got over it was this. Half the Indians went up and we with them, carrying ropes, until we got to a broader ledge so far up. Then we made the ropes taut round a firm angle and slung them down to those below. In this style Paul and Winifred were able to get up, otherwise, I doubt if they could have managed it as we did.

When we got them safe on the first ledge, we scrambled on like monkeys, zig-zag, until we

reached a second secure standing ground, and so on, until we got them safely on the top. What sure-footed chaps these Indians are, and without the slightest feelings of either nerves or the cold. We managed the climbing all right also, though it did try our nerves slightly, as our hands and feet became benumbed with the cold so that we could hardly know whether we had a grip or not. However, after a run about the snow on the top and a game of snowballs, we were once more in a warm glow and no frost bite. Winifred was pretty pale when we hauled her over the upper ridge, but after a minute or so she recovered her courage and joined us also laughingly in the game of pelting.

We could see miles of country all round us. The sun was shining brightly from a clear blue sky, while the air felt so thin and pure that it made us as merry as if we had been drinking champagne. Miles of country all snow covered; peaks of ice of every tint of soft bright blue, pink and purple; valleys and crevasses, dark and shady. Away to the north-east, about eight or ten miles off, lay Lake Lindemann, with its snow-covered larches lining the shores, and past that again, lap beyond lap of hills, all softly white and blue. It was a splendid and exhilarating sight to us who had surmounted the beastly pass.

Down in the pass we could see long lines of adventurers with their strings of luggage, sledges, dogs, horses and packs toiling slowly upwards, and others going downwards for articles they had left behind. There were not any in that crowd

able to come on as we had done, all together. They had to come on by slow degrees.

Some of the reckless ones were tobogganing down in their empty sledges and getting fine spills, we could see. They were only the vanguard of a vast army of gold hunters which would be swarming up presently.

We had prepared some cold provisions, as we had used up all the wood the night before, and could get no more until we reached Lake Lindemann. Next came the hauling up of our traps, but as we had arranged for them and ourselves to be transported safely to Lake Lindemann, we had nothing to do but watch them brought up and count them as they arrived. We were pleased to find all safe and in good order.

The method of hauling up packets is by a wire cable, and the charge for having the use of this cable is one cent per pound. Thus we paid fifty dollars for our four thousand four hundred pounds. It was a pretty heavy fee, but after we got past this portion of the journey we should be able to paddle our own canoes for the rest of the route.

When all were on the top, the next job was getting down on the other side, but this was managed in the simplest of manners, by shooting everything, ourselves included, down an incline almost perpendicular, into a filled-up and snow-covered crater.

We watched our packages fly down and drive along the flat surface of the crater until they were stopped by some ice hummocks. We watched them go down that five hundred feet of a sheer

drop, expecting them to burst open and scatter. As they didn't do this we prepared to follow, as there seemed no safer road to get down.

The five of us in one sledge, holding on like grim death to each other and the sides of the heavy sledge, our Indian, with the dogs, in another sledge, and the empty sledge coming by itself. The other Indians we had paid off at the summit, and they were now only waiting to watch our tobogganing before they went once more down.

For curiosity, we let our Indian with his dogs slide first, to see how they would get on. Down they went at a most blood-curdling speed until they reached the bottom, then they darted over towards the piled-up packages in the middle of the crater, and being arrested suddenly, they flew like birds into the air, cut several somersaults and landed on their backs in different places.

It was very comic to see this wild performance, and it made us laugh, even as we thought ruefully on our own coming descent. The Indians, however, beside us, did not laugh or even smile, they only looked on with grim indifference.

Our Indian, with the dogs also, did not seem any the worse of their flight and acrobatic feat. They picked themselves up at once, and while the dogs sat down sedately to wait our coming, their master began to clear a passage for us.

We next sent on the empty sledge, and it went down all right, rushing along butt against and smashing up the hummock that had stopped the packages, thus leaving us a clear course of several more yards on the snow. Then we let go, and for

the next second or two could not distinguish our sensations. It was only when we were shooting along the level stretch that we could breathe.

Bump, and we were scattered amongst the soft bundles which our Indian had thoughtfully placed to receive us. He wasn't a bad sort, that noble redskin, neither were we much hurt; nothing dislocated, only a good shaking and a few bruises.

Another couple or so of hours and we were merrily skimming over Lake Lindemann before a fair wind, with our sleighs laden up and our sails spread and bulging; then along the river, and by night we had fixed our tents on the shores of Lake Bennett.

So far we had got on splendidly. It had been hard work certainly, and might have been more dangerous had the weather been less favourable. We could, therefore, thank Providence that we had got along so far with safety.

We found over seventy future miners of Klondyke camped on the shores of Lake Bennett, all busily engaged in the task of boat-building, and as we had come here for the same purpose we pitched our tent beside them.

Fine, resolute fellows they mostly were, who had been in many a gold rush. Several of them had been sailors, and knew how the work ought to be done. They were all friendly with each other, as adventurers on such a risky journey ought to be, and did not grudge giving good practical advice to those who had not so much experience.

Amongst the seventy miners were fifteen women, the plucky wives of the men who were venturing

so far, and their presence made the camp a little more social.

It is pleasant to be with people who are hopeful as this Bennett Lake company were. At Dyea we heard nothing but curses and gloomy forebodings, while up the pass the sights we saw were not inspiring. Here, however, we had all got what is regarded as the worst part of the journey over, and we were inclined to treat the rest as a joke.

Therefore, we made ourselves as comfortable as possible, for to build a boat properly takes longer than a day or two, particularly when you have to fell the trees and saw them into planks.

Winifred Walters made inquiries about her husband, but none of them had seen him. Yet as the longest stayer there had only been a week he might easily have been and gone before they came.

She showed us a photo of Mr Walters. One of those small-featured, waxed-moustached, weak-looking, but intensely conceited creatures that one sees so often in waiters, stewards and drapers' assistants—the sort of pretty young fellows without a spark of manliness, truth or principle about them that foolish girls often fancy. We spared Winifred our opinion about that absconding hubby of hers. All the same, we did not think that he was the sort of fellow to brave the Chilkoot Pass. It was more likely that he had got into some soft billet on board one of the coasters and was going round the easy way by the Yukon River; that is, if he was going there at all.

‘What a heartless blackguard he must be to desert such a stunning girl,’ said Pete Glen to me when she was out of hearing.

'He is that,' I replied with emphasis.

'Do you know, Tom,' continued Pete, 'my firm belief is that he asked her to go this route, thinking she would not be able to survive the hardships.'

'Nor would she, had she not come with us here,' said Harold, doggedly.

'If that was the boulder's game, we'll do our best to spoil it,' I said.

'Yes, I reckon so,' answered Pete.

'If we get safe to Klondyke, so shall Winifred, and then I guess we'll be losing her.'

'Let us trust not, for she's a first-rate fellow, and I'd fight for her any day,' answered Harold.

You will see from this, that although we thought a great deal about Winifred, we were not prepared to extend the same kindly feeling to her absent lord and master.

'And yet,' I thought as I walked away from my chum and looked over the distant ranges at the setting sun, 'she is just one of the plucky, good girls that make heroes out of men, if they have anything of the man about them. Some men don't have more than the appearance of men: they should have been born monkeys.'

I grew somewhat pensive after making this very original reflection. Was I so much of a man myself that I dared to despise such a baboon as the absent Walters? I had been fond of collars, cuffs, studs and sleeve-links, and left them off with profound regret. There was no use hiding those truths from myself now that I was alone. I was even a bit particular and conceited over my Alaska furs.

I had also been bolder enough to fondly imagine that all the young ladies who had made so much of me in Sydney, Melbourne, Queens-town and London would be fairly heartbroken about my absence.

Now, I thought, suppose they were heartbroken, what right had I to make them miserable? It was as cowardly almost as the way Walters had treated his poor, brave young wife. Suppose, though, they were only having a little game with me, and laughing at my vanity all the time? What long-eared brayers young men can be, to be sure, about the balmy time that their moustaches begin to sprout!

I was going to be a very wretched young puppy, only what saved me was that a most sudden, serious and crying appetite assailed me at that moment and made me turn and rush back to the camp.

As I got near I could smell the most delicious odour of Irish stew wafting along the shores. It could only come from the tent, for that was nearest, and we were the only ones who had potatoes in the camp.

Other odours came faintly from further distances—perfumes of salted cod, red herrings and bacon being fried, likewise beans. But these, although heart-searching enough, were commonplace compared to the high-toned deliciousness and delicacy of that Irish stew as cooked by the radiant Winifred.

I rushed madly over the intervening space, and dashing aside the flaps, entered the tent.

Yes, they had commenced supper. No mortal

man, however polite, could wait for a late comer for dinner in the vicinity of Lake Bennett. Even dilatory royalty would be ignored in such a locality and on such an occasion.

But Mrs Winifred Walters had not forgotten me, and, thank goodness, she did not come of the polite breed who are apt to imagine that they are catering for sparrows or æsthetics. Thank goodness, Winifred was of homely parentage and American. She had gauged the depths of our stomachs with the glance of a widow when providing for a prospective second husband, or a mother before she becomes a mother-in-law, and the consequence was there was always enough.

And that, I think, is the great art of cooking—just to have enough and no more.

To have enough in Alaska needs a fine calculation. This is it :—

Fill the biggest pot you have, as much as it can hold and no more, for that would be wasting good food. If your stove can take on more than one pot at a time, fill as many as it can take. Depend upon it, the folks you are catering for will undertake to empty the pots and leave no waste, no matter how many you fill.

Paul had managed to shoot a brace of wild ducks that afternoon, and these, with a few slices of bacon, a tin of roast mutton, onions and potatoes, made *almost* enough for our supper.

CHAPTER XVIII

THROUGH THE RAPIDS

THEY were an abstinent company, as far as strong drink was concerned, these Argonauts on the shores of Lake Bennett. What whisky or brandy there were in their provisions were kept like 'pain-killer,' and such articles, strictly for medicinal purposes. The consequence was that we had few of the customary gold-miner flare-ups, and not one case of manslaughter all the time we were there.

Only one slight accident occurred amongst the single men while playing cards after work was over. One young fellow, suspecting the opposite man of dealing unfairly, pinned his hand against the plank with his sheath-knife. Afterwards, however, when he found that his suspicions were unjust, he apologised handsomely, and the incident went no farther.

Had they been drinking at the time any of the 'kill-at-sixty-yards' brands of whisky that are sent into the Yukon Valley, murder would have been morally certain. Work went on all the daylight, whatever the weather was, as all wished to get over the lakes before the ice broke up. The sound of axes were heard all day long in the

woods, chipping down trees and trimming them, blent with the coarse rasping of sharp saws as they ripped up the planks.

It was cheerful and healthy labour, for however severe the climate may be to weaklings, it is a wholesome and a bracing one to strong men. You must either become robust and sounder in the Arctic regions or else collapse swiftly and find your woes at an end. The delicate ones, doubtless, were on the Dyea side of the Chilkoot ranges, and were likely to stay there for ever. The sound-lunged men and women were here, laughing, singing, whistling, jesting and working like Trojans.

Hard work kept us from feeling the cold during the day, and when night dropped upon us there was that wide sheet of ice to skate over. We all had skates, and could all use them also.

The moon gave us light for the first night or two, but as there was abundance of wood, we lit huge fires on the banks to see our way by. When the weather was too stormy to enjoy the outside, we did the social and visited the different tents, singing and listening to songs and recitations. One young matron had brought her banjo, another gentleman played the violin, while there were three concertinas in the camp and two flutes.

You can guess from this that we were by no means leading a sad or monotonous life, with all this talent and lively spirits which the keen air accentuated. A man may get too tired with work to be able to enjoy fun or exercise afterwards in the tropics or in vitiated cities, but he does not so

easily get tired out where the wind blows over glaciers.

We were able to work all day from dawn till dark, for the days were getting long now, and every noon the sun was rising higher in the heavens, proclaiming that the long night would soon be over, for three months at least. At nights we were able to dance or skate till almost midnight without being the least exhausted.

They were a singular lot these hardy Argonauts, who only visited cities in order to spend their hard and precarious earnings quickly. Crafty as Indians in some things, yet simple as children in others, and as emotional as women when they were rightly tackled.

Paul Ravenwood understood their natures thoroughly, for he was one of them himself. The American portion used, perhaps, the most outrageous oaths, besides being ready to shoot at sight, and without the least compunction, whoever offended them; yet although keen and ruthless as bloodhounds when gambling, pitilessly greedy at making a bargain, and ferociously joyful over a lynching programme, they were all more or less religiously inclined.

Most of them carried their Bibles and hymn-books with them, and when not on a drinking expedition they seemed to turn naturally to their Bibles for consolation. The other members of the party were not nearly so emotional, nor so inconsistent.

Paul was both a good reader and expounder, and soon had quite a congregation in and round

our tent. I don't think he would quite have suited a city audience, yet his system seemed the right one to be understood and appreciated by those primitive disciples.

On the second day of our sojourn he announced that he would give a Bible reading that evening. Without exception, the camp attended and listened seriously. After the reading and exposition he said he was open for a little argument, if anyone required his doubts cleared.

One of the young men accepted his invitation, but before he had time to open his mouth Paul said,—

'Just one moment, mate—have you got your shooter about you?'

The young man answered that he had not.

'That's a pity, for I never like to take a fellow-creature at a disadvantage, and I happen to have mine close at hand. Now, as I have said, I am open to answer reasonable doubts, but I cannot listen to religion being mocked at without shooting the blasphemer, so be careful—and proceed.'

The Yankee portion applauded these sentiments, while the young man thought that he would postpone his inquiries till another night.

After this, those who came dropped in to listen and not to argue with the preacher. He spoke kindly and well, and made his influence felt in the camp, for he was obliging and generous with his help to those who required it, therefore was generally liked.

On the third day also, when a couple of our old shipmates dropped in upon us, and told the camp

how neatly he had cleaned out the notorious Dan Fairmaner at cards, even the most atheistic of the single men came in to listen respectfully. A man who could shoot as they had seen him do, and win so many dollars from Dan, must have seen something convincing in religion to be so earnest about it.

On the second Sunday, for we were two weeks before we could get away from that lake side, Paul gave an open-air discourse, and everyone attended. Only once, when accidentally he happened to put his right hand quickly into the breast of his fur overcoat, half the congregation ducked their heads, and the other half shot up both their hands like lightning. Paul looked sadly at the crowd for an instant when he saw these motions, and then he smiled a little grimly, as he brought out his hand empty. Confidence was once more restored, and the meeting went on after this without a hitch.

The boat which we built was after the canoe fashion, long, deep and narrow, with rounded bottom and no keel, or rather with two keels, after the style of the sledges. In fact she was both to serve as a boat and as a sledge.

She was a clumsy affair when completed, for we had raised a kind of deck-house at the stern, and a deck along the other parts. She took up a lot of wood, but was strong and taut, as we had caulked and tarred her properly on the outside and bottom.

We rigged her up fishing-smack-style, with one large square sail, which we could haul up and down as wanted, and then, to complete all, we christened her the *Winifred*, as a slight compliment to the

girl who had cheered and looked after us so well.

Several of our company had gone before we were ready to start, and every day fresh prospectors were arriving and starting work. Lake Bennett was one of the pleasantest rests we had all the way, the men were all so genial and the women so good-natured and hopeful.

The sun had shone warmly for one or two days before we left, and gave us our first experience of Arctic mosquitoes. What savage and venomous vermin they are—something between a wasp and one of their tropical species. They swarmed in myriads and stung like fury all the time the sun shone. An intensely cold, frosty night, however, setting in, drove them off to their winter quarters. How these insects can exist in such icy regions is the wonderful point about it. That they should be more venomous than their tropical kin seems natural, for they must be strong to survive such winters. They are the curse of the Arctic summer, and can torture people and animals almost to the verge of suicide.

Having launched our ship *Winifred* on the ice, we loaded her most carefully, so that she might be properly balanced, then taking on a good supply of brushwood for our stove, we started upon the second half of our journey—towards the rapids.

These rapids would be the trying part, where, with a craft so large, we had to look out and keep her clear from snaggs and rocks. We had strong poles and oars, however, and knew what to do in the matter of steering.

Those on the shore cheered us as we drove off before a smart wind, bade us a fervent God-speed, and trusted that we should all meet soon at Klondyke. Alas! less than a half never reached the goldfields. They were swamped and drowned in the rapids, and their bodies and wrecked stores, beaten past all semblance of humanity or use, dashed against the shores lower down.

As it is either blowing half a gale or a dead calm in those regions, we took advantage of a right wind, accompanied by snow, and made a fair run down the twenty-five miles to the foot of Lake Bennett. There we camped for the night, with the snow still falling heavily.

Next morning it was clear, but intensely cold, and dead calm, so that there was nothing for it but to wait for the wind. We got enough in the afternoon to help us along, while we got out and hauled our ship along the frozen stream until we got to Windy Arm and past it, then we camped again.

This part was very mountainous, and again we heard the sound of the ice breaking and roaring down the gorges like with an awful thunder. The night was intensely dark and cloudy, which did not add to our happiness.

Again the wind came to our rescue, and kept with us until we got half way down the last of the lakes, and a few miles from the Lewis River.

But it was a wet wind, and, as we advanced, the snow melted and the ice became so rotten that we were forced to run our vessel to the shore and fasten her up. After a heavy afternoon's work we got the ice broken round her, and had her floating

in a good basin of water. She floated beautifully.

There was nothing left for us now but to wait on the melting of the ice. Spring had already announced its presence by a hundred signs, and if by nothing else than the increasing hordes of hungry mosquitoes, these were enough. They were with us always now, and every day in added legions.

We had been now nearly a month on the way since leaving Dyea, and had come a distance of one hundred and twenty miles. We had four hundred and fifty-six miles still to go.

Of course we had spent two weeks at Lake Bennett building our boat, and now, here we were stuck on this mud lake, with no possibility of going before the ice entirely broke up. That might be another fortnight or more, according to weather.

Yet, but for those never absent mosquitoes, it was a pleasant enough place to be stranded. The lake was pretty and full of fish, and at the back of us were woods with all sorts of game of the feathered kind—ducks, geese, swans, and other specimens—all good for eating.

The lake, though, was very shallow and muddy, being only an extended marsh and home for the wild fowl. There were some nasty bogs and quick-sands about that made us careful when we went out to hunt. The spring was coming on rapidly, and every day the sunbeams fell hotter over the ice and earth. The grass was growing up on all sides, the young leaves were sprouting out, and the snow was tumbling wholesale from the trees.

We had fresh food every day now, for it was

hardly possible to miss the numerous flocks that went whirring over our heads. It was not so easy to secure them afterwards, as the ice was now past bearing us; still we managed to get those which we shot inland, and fine bags we made.

On the third day of our stay the ice began to break up in all directions, and drift along towards the river, leaving few spaces. Then we pulled our barge along, keeping clear of the blocks. As we got near to the river the water became deeper and the tide more rapid. We were once more upon our way, with a good wind behind us.

Our vessel was not a racer at speed, but she went steady, and, I am glad to say, answered the rudder quickly. She was sound also, and not likely to ship water; her deck was level over the hull, and only surrounded by an open rail. We had taken care to cover the deck with tarpaulin as we drew near to the rapids.

We saw several boats ahead of us as we entered the Lewis River, but as they were lighter than we were, they left us behind and disappeared round the steep and tortuous banks.

For about twenty-five miles we sailed easy enough on a wide river with wooded banks. Then the river begins to narrow, and the banks to become rocky cliffs.

Now the first of the gorges are before us, and we are already within the clutch of the rapid.

The sail has been taken down before this and Winifred shut into the deck-house. It is no sight for even the bravest girl to look upon the shooting of that rapid.

I am entrusted with the steering gear, while Paul, Harold and Pete stand with their strong poles watching ahead to shove her off the jutting rocks. We are all eyes now as we watch while we dash along.

We are into it now with a vengeance, the waves leaping all over us as the torrent sucks us into the grand canyon. Two or three minutes were all we took to get over that first quarter of a mile of roaring and swirling waters, all white with pent-in passion.

We knew where the rocks were though we could not see them, for the waves spouting up eight feet into the air as they dashed against those impediments, and right between those foam-spoutings I steered the boat.

For the next few miles the river was more or less bad as it widened or narrowed, then we went slap into the White Horse Gorge with the waters in a wilder state of rage than ever.

Paul wanted us to stop and tie up for the night before we attempted this second rapid, but our blood was up and there was light enough still to do it, so on we went.

How any of these poor fellows, unaccustomed to steering, ever got through this last gorge seemed a wonder to us after we were over it. It was simply diabolical and blood-curdling in its awful boil and uprising. We were swept through it by a miracle, for, quick as I was, I could not have been quick enough had it depended merely on my guidance.

We went through it as we had gone down the



Two or three minutes were all we took over that first quarter
of a mile of swirling waters.

Chilkoot slide, only with the shrieking, tearing and tossing of a thousand storm-waves mixed all up.

But our water-tight *Winifred* did her duty as nobly as the good angel she was called after always did, and when, wearied out, we lay down that night to sleep we all uttered a double prayer for our preservation.

CHAPTER XIX

AT DAWSON CITY

TWO days afterwards we lay becalmed on the smooth waters of Lake Labarge. We were in no particular hurry now, for all the distance we could make by rowing was not worth the exertion; besides, during the mid-day it was getting already too hot for much extra exertion.

We dined off fresh trout that day, and then through the afternoon and night did some good sailing, as the wind rose and sent us along at a fair speed.

After the smooth lake we entered the lower river, and were drawn by a swift current over some very dangerous and rough water. The river was full of treacherous rocks against which the torrent dashed and swirled in parts rather wildly. We were running along at the rate of twenty and twenty-four miles an hour, and with those sunken rocks to avoid took some smart steering as well as close watching.

But the scenery was magnificent, at least, so Winifred told us afterwards. We had quite enough to do to watch the river as we were swept along.

The sail was of no use now, for the current did

all the work, and we were going along at the rate of five or six miles an hour, sometimes faster, but never slower.

Past high banks, all green with young leaves, flowers and grasses, with glimpses of lofty mountains, their lower parts patched with the drifted snow, and the crests still smoothly white.

Then into another rapid, where the walls are not above thirty yards wide, and the whole volume of waters are sent seething and boiling along, with waves and spume covering you up entirely as you fly along.

There seemed to be no termination to these rapids and narrows as we were swept along the tributaries of the Yukon River until Port Selkirk was reached. No sooner were we congratulating ourselves that we were safe at last than we saw the river banks close in once again, and, lo, another furious rapid had to be shot.

Sometimes the river was a mile wide, with a five-mile current upon it and pretty islands dotting its surface, then it drew in between high cliffs to one hundred or even thirty yards, then the thundering waves and twenty-mile rush went on again, while we trembled as we steered over the unknown dangers.

After Port Selkirk, however, and we got into the Yukon, it was comfortable sailing, for we could hoist our sail at last and go along easy on a river gradually widening from a mile.

We could afford to take our ease now and look at the landscape. It was all that Winifred had described it to be.

Finely timbered banks and islands, rocky and wooded hills running down to the water's edge, lovely flowers of blue, pink and white and the most lavish of greens.

The days were very long now, and the sun already as hot as midsummer in England. Very soon there would be no darkness at all.

And the mosquitoes were hungrier and more dense than ever. If they went on swarming like this, how should we be able to live?

At length we reached Dawson City, after two months and a half trail towards it from Dyce—and what a place it is. We have taken in our stuff, but as to the advantage, it is hard yet to say.

The city was merely a collection of log huts of the roughest description on the banks of the Klondyke River, with little regard to arrangement. It was clear that no one as yet contemplated making this place their permanent habitation. They came to get what they could and clear out as soon as possible.

It was not a desolate land, however, at the present time. The hills beyond were rugged and well wooded, and back from the city the timber was large and fairly abundant. They were clearing it away at a rapid rate, however, and it would before long be a scarce necessity. The water of the Klondyke was very muddy and bad, yet there were plenty of fish to be got out of it.

The heat was tropical. Where men and women had been shivering under the warmest furs and blankets for nine months, they were now going about clad in the thinnest and scantiest of clothing.

The blazing sun never left the sky for long, and under its fierce beams vegetation in that moist soil grew like magic. On the cliffs the weeds and wild flowers spread themselves lavishly. Some of these flower and tree-bearing cliffs were not composed of rock, but were old ice-packs which had gathered upon their ledges and surfaces a few inches of earth, and on this foundation those small trees and shrubs flourished for a time. When they grew too large for their thin base to support, the first tempest brought them down headlong.

There was no real darkness during the short summer; when the sun was not shining, a bright twilight, like subdued daylight, spread over the heavens, and produced a gentle quietness and softened shadow over the land.

At least the soft shadow was there, but seldom did stillness reign, day or night, in Dawson City or on the banks of the river. The bars, saloons and dancing-rooms were always open and nearly always filled with revellers of both sexes, and the mosquitoes were never far away.

Only one occupation was followed here, and that was prospecting and gold digging. Every one had a turn at digging, women as well as men. When they were tired of work, they trooped into the town and went into the drink shops, to drink poison labelled whisky, play stud-horse poker, or dance with the ladies—adventuresses who had braved the trials and dangers of that awful journey for the sake of getting gold any way.

Some of these adventuresses were young, pretty and highly accomplished, who could dance and

sing and play burlesque and opera bouffe ; some were obese, bloated and painted to cover their age and ugliness. But those who had come there husbandless were nearly all wicked, shameless and vice-hardened—women who required a revolver to convert them from their iniquities.

Food had been mighty scarce that past winter, and even at present they were living mostly upon what they could purchase from the newcomers or get from the creeks. Game also was scarce, the larger game particularly so, as the multitude, who had rushed into this solitude with dynamite, rifles and revolvers had frightened such away from the vicinity of the settlement.

The only article that was not scarce, although it could not possibly have been worse, was whisky. The storekeepers were well supplied with this luxury, although their shelves were otherwise empty and bare.

A scattering of log houses and an encampment of tents—this was the city of Dawson. There was no attempt at cleanliness or fashion ; women went about with their skirts and blouses ragged and torn, their faces sun-tanned and mud-stained, their hair untended and their boots leaking, many of them stockingless, like the lowest tramps and vagrants. Men exhibited shirts and pants that were miracles in the way of dilapidation, patches and dirt. There were no barbers on the field, and the men were too busy digging for gold or debauching to dream about doing these offices for themselves ; therefore, long tresses and flowing beards were the fashion, which gave them the appearance of desperate ruffians.

A regular supply of provisions could not possibly come for a couple of months yet ; therefore, articles of food were at famine prices.

There had been six thousand men and women in and about Dawson City, living as best they could during those long dark months of winter without a change. Hundreds had died of utter starvation and cold, and lain unburied for months, where they fell.

Prospectors, going out when daylight once more appeared, had seen frozen bodies lying half-devoured, with their pockets and bags bulging with gold dust. The beasts of the forest most likely had been the devourers in those cases where the nuggets were untouched, as the lower animal creation does not value gold dust. But nearer the city and within the city, skeletons had been found with no gold dust beside them. Also portions of mutilated corpses had been buried, with bullet holes through their skulls and gaping knife wounds. The inhabitant of Klondyke who discovered these ghastly relics buried them out of sight as quickly as possible, and tried to forget what he had seen. Before men die of starvation, they do not pause at trifles.

Over a thousand strangers had come to Klondyke these past few weeks we were told when we arrived. Sixteen or seventeen hundred had set out to come, but the seven hundred had fallen by the way.

These thousand, having brought each a good supply of provisions, were lured into selling as much as they dared part with, at the most ex-

orbitant prices. The emaciated winterers did not care what price they paid, so that they got the article which they wanted—that is, those who had the gold. The unlucky members disappeared. Men were so constantly disappearing from this community that no curiosity was excited at their absence.

All the claims for miles round were taken up. If we wanted one for ourselves we should have to go farther away.

Our boat caused a little comment, for she was the biggest that had yet come from the lake and rapid direction. We were likewise besieged by the famished crowd of successful gold miners to sell all that we could possibly spare. It was a case of sell, or else get our goods stolen; therefore we made up our minds to retain four months' provisions for our own use, and part with the rest.

This was our first occupation at Dawson City. We divided each packet of food into three lots. One for ourselves, one to sell to the hungry capitalists, and one to *give* to the unfortunate who had no money left to buy. This was Paul's idea, and we agreed to it willingly. We should make enough out of what we sold to indemnify us for what we gave for charity.

There was a fierce competition over the sale. Paul put the goods up to auction, and acted as auctioneer, and a mighty cute one he was.

All the time he was selling he kept his eyes upon the crowd on the river bank. Almost all the city was there, and a pretty hungry set of citizens they were.

They were all in the same condition as to appetite, and eyed the tins of preserves, bags of flour, beans and other sundries with glistening eyes as Paul held them up.

The gold dust holders quickly stepped into the front rank and lost no time in bidding for all they were worth. The unsuccessful miners looked on silently with murderous flashings of their fierce eyes.

We all acted as auctioneer's assistants, and noted the loud-voiced bidders, then when they had got their bargains, Paul closed the sale. Then he held up his hand for silence.

'I've sold all that I have to sell, ladies and gentlemen, and I hope you are satisfied.'

The purchasers shouted that they were; the non-purchasers looked on gloomy, but hopeless, as they drew their belts a hole or so tighter.

'I have a few things still left to lend, though, to some of those who may need them, but have no cash at present to go on the ready system.'

The gloomy faces brightened up at this news, and the monied men stood back and left the field.

'I haven't enough stuff to spread over this multitude,' cried Paul, 'but if you care to make a lottery of it, I'll take the winners up to two hundred.'

We knew that Paul would ask no conditions from these poor fellows, yet it was more than his life was worth to offer them charity. They would accept credit or a loan, but not a gift.

A committee was rapidly formed, when it was

decided that the married men should have the first chances, and to this they strictly adhered.

Meanwhile we were hard at work dividing our second lot into as many small parcels as we could, and, for the sake of appearances, weighing them out carefully.

It was a busy afternoon, but it made us much better known than if we had paraded ourselves for six months ; also, although we could only give them a little, yet the intention was appreciated.

For the next few days we went over the gold-fields making strict inquiries about the husband of Winifred, but without success. He had not yet arrived, therefore we were forced to conclude that he was either amongst the sacrificed seven hundred who had perished on the way, or else that he had deceived and abandoned his wife.

We were not sorry that he was not there to claim her and take her from us, and I don't think that she was very sad about it either, at least, she did not exhibit any grief.

'He may come by the Yukon River steamers,' said Paul to her, 'so, Winifred, you had best stay with us meanwhile.'

A walk round Dawson City was quite sufficient to make Winifred decide to share our fortunes. It wasn't exactly the place for an unprotected girl to be stranded.

Paul also went about the saloons and gambling hells while we were there, and we took our turns to accompany him. He was looking, too, for some one that he expected to be here. Who it was he did not at the time say, but from his intent

glances at the men, and cautious inquiries with the women, I reckoned that it was someone whom he had not yet seen. Likewise, from the stern expression of his face as he went about watching and asking, I should not like to have been the someone. Paul Ravenwood was a religious man and a good friend, but he belonged to the old order rather than the new in his ideas.

However, he was as unsuccessful as Winifred was in her search; therefore, one fine evening we sailed away from Dawson City on a prospecting expedition.

We were all glad to get away, for it was not a wholesome community for either man or woman to stay long in.

In one of the dancing-saloons I saw a handsome woman shot through the brain while she was dancing, simply because she had refused to dance with the man who shot her. He was kicked and trampled by the infuriated crowd into a pulp, while the murdered woman received a grand funeral. Poor thing! she had wrought a deal of mischief in her life, and caused during the winter the death of several fine fellows; but yet it was pitiful to die and be buried in Klondyke.

CHAPTER XX

THE REASON WHY PAUL CAME TO KLONDYKE

WE located on one of the many tributaries, or 'pups,' as they call those creeks, of the Klondyke.

It was a very tiny mountain torrent, about twenty-five miles from Dawson City. We could secure no nearer site; at least, none nearer that seemed to our experienced leader, Paul Ravenwood, to be as good as this one.

There was the show of gold all along the river, Paul announced, and he knew what he was saying; but we were in a hurry to scoop it out quickly, and at this particular spot the show was rich and the locality a likely one, from a miner's experience, to be lasting, and that is what we wanted.

There were five of us, for we determined to slump in Winifred as an equal partner, whether she was claimed herself afterwards or not.

That gave us the right to take up two thousand five hundred square feet.

Looking carefully about for a couple of weeks, Paul decided that we could not fix upon more promising ground; therefore we measured it carefully, pegged it out, took our licences out, had the commissioners down, and made all safe before we started work.

We were five working, and genuine miners, of course, and on the spot, otherwise we could not have taken out such an area, for the authorities, rightly, are particular about this; if they were not, a company might claim five hundred feet for each shareholder, and thus the country would be entirely in the hands of the capitalists. We paid each one pound for our claim licence—that is, five pounds—before we could start work as owners of the ground; also, every alternate five hundred feet belonged to the Canadian Government. Thus, although we possessed five hundred feet each, each claim was separated from the other by five hundred feet, making a break which belonged to the Government.

Paul got over this difficulty in his usual astute way, by taking up for each of us different portions of the creek, which he had tapped for several miles. Thus we had five distinct mines to work upon.

Besides the alternate claims and the licence fees, the Canadian Government claims ten per cent. on every hundred pounds' worth of gold taken out per week and twenty per cent. on all sums above that amount. Whether this is just and fair, or otherwise, I leave my readers and future legislators to decide. We were risking our lives in an unopened land, which, as yet, the Government had done nothing to advance. We had risked our lives in coming so far. We had to provide everything for ourselves or else die of starvation. How many martyrs had done so already? Men like Paul Ravenwood were giving their vast experiences to

the Government free, gratis and for nothing, as far as the Government were concerned; and the Government was grabbing all this profit without doing more than sending over commissioners and a few policemen, who were inadequate.

If they had built, or would build, a railway to Klondyke to bring provisions to the starving heroes and pioneers who were advancing their interests and pouring wealth into their treasuries, one could condone this extortion. But will they do so before thousands of God's creatures are sacrificed? I hope so. I am quoting Paul's bitter words, as we used to sit at nights, after our day's hard labour, sometimes profitless, sometimes good. We were doing the work, but the people who did nothing were getting a big share.

Yet we were not too discontented. The mosquitoes were simply appalling. The earth that we dug out was hard as iron after we got a few inches below the surface, for that tropical sun did little better for us than a winter fire.

All under us was solid froze, after those few inches of thaw, even in the heat of summer. We got down so far and had to stop and let the sun thaw some more. We were working under the heat of a furnace, over a refrigerator. It was a singular sensation—our hands and bodies baking with the heat and our feet freezing. Often I wished I could work on my head.

It was a fine spot we had fixed upon for our first claim; a bend in the 'pup,' or creek, and at the foot of a little cascade, where the water rushed over clearly. It was lovely water, for it came straight

from the snows and ice, and it was clear as crystal.

Trees grouped up on every side of us—larches and yellow cedars, with mosses more than knee deep. There were rocks and boulders upstarting all over the valley and earth, or 'dirt,' as they call it, all pregnant with the ore.

After we were sure of our spot, for a few panfuls decided that, we built a comfortable log hut and plastered it inside and out with clay. We fixed up a bedroom for Winifred, and slept ourselves in the kitchen. In the summer time this was best, but when winter came we would all get as near the stove as possible. Then Winifred's room would be used as a storehouse.

As for our luck, it varied some weeks, but not many. We had some weeks only to account to the Government ten per cent. Most weeks it ran to twenty. We were making money hand over fist while the summer lasted. At the end of July, when I was deputed to carry down the gold dust, we were owing the Canadian Government three thousand pounds at twenty per cent.

To put it in prosaic figures, out of our first claim we had raked sixty thousand pounds' worth of gold between the five of us in two months, which meant twelve thousand pounds each.

We worked hard for that, you may conclude, my dear reader. When a man once touches gold on a gold claim, he doesn't care much for any other amusement. Paul kept his head the best under this good fortune; as for the rest of us, we were simply wild with our extraordinary luck.

One night Paul told me his reasons for coming up to Klondyke. He didn't care for gold, for he had made plenty. Besides, he was one of those lucky mortals who, like King Midas, made all that he took up turn into gold. Nine years before this he had married a girl who seemed to be everything a man could wish for to make him happy.

He wasn't quite so lucky in those days, but he thought he had luck when he married that woman, for she was beautiful and young, and she seemed to be as much in love with him as he was with her.

'For six months,' he said, 'I was happier than I thought a man had any right to be, considering the original curse laid upon us by Adam and Eve. My wife was like the apple of my eye, and seemed tender, good and true. I had a young brother also staying with me, who was the next dearest treasure on which I could count.

'Well, to make more money, I went away from home, and stopped away just six months—all the time, mind you, my young wife wrote to me constantly the most affectionate epistles. My brother also wrote, but he was too fond of me to disturb me with any bad news.

'I made money—piles of it—and when I thought I had made enough I rushed back home.

'Not fast enough, though, for when I got there I found that my wife had eloped with a scoundrel only the day previously, and my brother lay dying from a pistol-shot.

'He had discovered the intrigue too late, and then he tried to avenge my honour and got his death instead.'

Paul was telling me the story in gasps. We were sitting together on a bank of wild flowers while he told it so baldly, and I felt my heart bursting as I listened.

‘My poor brother described the man, and told me the direction they had taken as I held his head before he died.

‘Then, when I had buried him, I started on the trail. I have been on it for the last eight years.

‘Two years ago I found out that they had gone to London, and I followed them, as you may suppose, for I had my brother as well as my wife to avenge.

‘My boy, don’t ever wish my experiences of London. I lived in it and hunted through it until at last I tracked her down.

‘She, like my poor brother, was dying, when I found her this last February—dying in a slum, of starvation and neglect. The ruffian had left her, to go to Klondyke—left her to starve like a dog.

‘Well, I got his description also from my poor erring wife before she passed away, and, besides that, two photographs of him taken some years younger.

‘Two things she told me, however, which will make me recognise him when I come across him. One is his eyes: one is blue and the other brown, and when he looks straight at anyone he has a peculiar absent stare. The other thing is his voice: he has a rich tenor, and his favourite song is, “When other lips and other eyes”; so I go to the places where he is likely to frequent, and I look and listen.

‘He may be disguised. His name is sure to be altered, but when I see those eyes and hear the song and voice all in one person, I’ll risk the person and do my duty as society, moral and civil, expects me to do.’

When he had finished his story, he pulled out of his breast-pocket a *carte-de-visite*, and showed me the face of his enemy.

I looked at the handsome, clear-cut features with a shudder. They were like the features of Dan Fairmaner.

‘It isn’t Dan, for both his eyes are one colour, and his voice isn’t tenor; but I think it must be some relation of his,’ said Paul, in answer to my thought.

Now, Paul wasn’t the sort of man to blab about his troubles to everyone, nor do I think that he would have told me but for a reason.

I was on the eve of going down to the city for provisions; that is, I was appointed leader of the expedition, with Harold, Pete and Winifred under my charge, while he was to stay behind and look after the gold dust and mine.

We were taking Winifred with us, partly because she was now as useful in managing the boat as we were, partly because she wished to find out if her husband had come yet.

Although there was no danger of our claims being jumped, since we had registered them properly; still, for the present, we had no desire to cause a rush before we examined the other four claims a little farther. This was the Winifred claim we were now tapping; we had still the Ravenwood,

the Prince, the Brownlee and the Peter Glen to investigate.

Paul was going to prospect the others while we were away, for we had now got down to the ice-bound level here ; therefore there was no advantage in working it more at present, a week or so of the sun heat would soften a few more inches and enable us to resume. Also we could thaw the holes with fires during the winter.

Paul told me his story, because he wished me to help him in his hunt after this murderer, and as a token of his trust in my intelligence and friendship, and I resolved to do my utmost to merit his good opinion.

He spoke calmly, even at the most tragic parts, as people sometimes do tell their afflictions after a lapse of years. A man may remember a wrong, and keep to his pitiless purpose of justice' all through his life, but the passions of love and grief grow quiet as the years roll on.

At first I daresay he was a frantic madman in his fury and despair, and thought life at an end ; but eight or ten years make a difference in the heart of a human being.

'While I was first hunting the assassin about the States,' Paul said, 'I mastered the art of gambling until I had made such a reputation that even Dan Fairmaner has not yet won. The man I was after was a sharper, and I meant, if there was no other way of getting at him, to expose him first and get him lynched afterwards. To do this, it was needful for me to master all the tricks of the trade.'

'But if you had discovered him, you could have had him arrested anywhere, surely,' I said.

'No. In some parts—the lawless parts of America, where he was most likely to be found—his crimes might only have won him admirers. The breaking up of a home isn't regarded as much of a fault even in the most civilised society, except to the dishonoured and outraged victims, and the unhappy children, perhaps. As for the shooting of a man, that is a common event in America. He could always give the plea that he had done it in self-defence. There was one thing only I could do, and that was, execute him myself when I found him, or show him up as a cheat and get him lynched. Stealing and cheating at cards are the two capital crimes on pioneer diggings. Well, I wandered all over the States seeking for the hound, without ever meeting him. If he had known I was after him I should have thought he was dodging me.'

'Perhaps he did,' I suggested.

'I think not; I had taken another name—the one I whispered to Madame Cora Greenback, or Brooklin, after my game with Dan, and, therefore, was only regarded as an ordinary "sport." Besides, I grew a beard and dyed it, and that makes a difference on a man.'

'Still, your wife may have been able to penetrate your disguise, and seen you when you didn't see her.'

'Perhaps that was the reason he managed to evade me all these years; but, if he comes to Klondyke, I don't think he'll be able to get away.'

‘But he may hear that you are in the country ; your name is known now.’

‘Ah, that is the singular part of it, and shows the irony of fate. When I first went on the hunt I was a comparatively poor man, and bore an assumed name. Four years ago my uncle on the mother’s side died, leaving me his heir to a considerable fortune, on condition that I adopted my mother’s maiden name, Ravenwood. The name I was christened and married by is a different one, which it is needless to tell you. You see, therefore, that if this man hears the name of Ravenwood it will mean nothing to him.’

‘But if he is a friend of Dan’s and knows your assumed name, he may be warned.’

‘Right you are, sonny. That was *a* big mistake on my part. The result of *a* sinful vanity. Beware of vanity, and let us hope that Dan or Cora do not meet him before he comes up here and the river freezes. Then he can hear what he likes, for I shall have him at last, and can settle and be done with that long-standing account.’

So Paul was a rich man already before he joined us. We were all on the way to be millionaires, so that a few thousands more or less did not matter. Yet, I thought, if I had been rich I don’t think I should have come to Klondyke merely to kill a man.

CHAPTER XXI

DAWSON CITY LIFE

WE took dollars and English sovereigns down with us to pay for our provisions, and resolved not to do any boasting, if we could help it, about our good fortune.

The creek which we had taken up, and which we named 'Ravenwood,' was, as I have said, picturesque and healthy. With its summer leafage, it looked for all the world just like a Highland glen, with the foaming burn gushing over the stones and rocks. We had built our hut on a little prominence above our first claim, and we felt, as we rowed our boat away from that little gully, as if we were leaving home. Paul came with us for a mile or two, as pulling was hard work against the stream, then we landed him, and saw him stride through the woods with his gun over his shoulder, while we went on.

We were a merry party of youngsters as we made our way slowly up the stream all through the luminous night. When the forenoon sun blazed down upon us, we tied up and had a sleep, then, after some tucker, went on again.

'I guess, if your husband has come, that he'll want you now, Winifred,' said Harold the blunt.

'I don't know if he'll get me now,' replied Winifred. 'I am no longer the silly fool I was, and he has some explanations to make before I can pardon his leaving me as he did.'

She said this with a stern tightening of her pretty lips and a relentless expression in her eyes, that made us all hope she would carry out her programme.

She was right in saying that she was altered during the past months. Her eyes had become clearer and brighter, her figure firmer and harder, her step more springy and her actions freer; her cheeks had become like roses, and if she was browner in the skin and harder in the hands, we boys had no objections to that. She was no longer a town-bred, languid waster, but a boisterous, healthy girl, who could both do her share of working and eating as well as any of us.

I doubt if her dandy husband would know her now, with her resolute, bronzed face and shapely brown arms. There was not much of the soft female about her now, yet, for all that, she looked a hundred degrees prettier. I was the recognised leader on this voyage, but in her own gentle, coaxing way she bossed us all pretty much as she liked.

There was no attempt at style with us, I must say. It was scorchingly hot weather, except at nights, when it got chilly, and we dressed up to suit the weather and our wardrobes.

Winifred wore a grey flannel shirt, with collar attached, which had been mine until it shrunk in the washing. This, with a bit of ribbon at the neck, made a very decent blouse for her serge and much-patched skirt. Her own boots had long since given way, so, as the weather was warm, and there was a good deal of mud-wading to be done, she had a fine pair of mud moccasins for the present. We meant to get some needful articles, if they could be got, in town, and feet covering for Winifred was one of the items. Therefore, with a battered, soft felt hat on her head and mud-painted feet, Winifred did not look exactly like the owner of twelve thousand pounds and the fifth share in five A1 gold mines. But she looked what she was for all that—a downright honest, sweet-tempered and smashing girl.

She was just the sort of girl that any plucky young fellow would cheerfully have gone through fire and water to serve, for she was as true as steel, as honest as daylight and as brave as a lion. Who could have thought her so capable who first saw her drooping and broken-hearted on board the steamer? She was down a bit in her spirits then, as anyone might easily have been, deceived and deserted like she was by a fool. But, now that she had conquered her sentimental melancholy, and was open-eyed and clear-witted, she was all that a fellow could wish for in a sister, or a chum, or, in fact, anywhere that girls are needed in life. She had only one fault, which was a mortal bad one—she belonged to a knavish fool.

However, if she didn't want to go to him, we

were all three willing and ready to see that he didn't take her against her will.

We went also with bare feet into Dawson City, partly out of compliment to our chum, but mainly because we hadn't summer boots, and our winter ones were much too heavy for this blazing weather. Our shirts were clean, and, like our pants, well patched, for Winifred didn't neglect us, you bet. Thus we all went into Dawson City without anything in our outward appearance to raise the spirit of envy in any self-respecting tramp. When we got close to the township Winifred put on her blue snow-glasses, which completely disguised her, and robbed her of the biggest half of her beauty—those merry and laughter-making eyes.

'We'll go about, boys, quietly, and watch,' she said. 'If Walters has come, and got any coin, we'll discover him in some saloon, and I'd just like to find out what he is up to before I announce my unwelcome presence.'

She no longer called him Fred, as she had done when speaking about him at the beginning of the trip. When a woman doesn't use the Christian name of her husband, I fancy it is a sign that she has lost a big lump of her respect for him, and not a little of her affection.

What a change the past six weeks had made in Dawson City. We had hardly seen a stranger in our creek house, as we had taken the opposite direction to where the gold rush was spreading; and those who had come said we were wasting our time down there; therefore we did not hear much news.

The sight, therefore, that met our eyes was fairly staggering. Already the houses had increased three times the number, while along, on the marshes and banks, hundreds of tents stood where only twenties had appeared before. The forest, also, was being cleared at a most alarming rate, considering the winter in front of them.

Ten or twelve thousand people were now on the field, and still they came rushing in by hundreds, all blistered and swelled with the sunbeams and the mosquitoes; sweltering, sweating, swearing, and drinking themselves mad. It was like pandemonium broken loose. The few policemen who rode about could no more keep order over that lawless mob than they could fly: they were only there as ornaments.

But provisions for the time were plentiful, and reasonably cheap, for the Yukon was now open, and steamers were coming in at frequent intervals and unloading.

Miners' rights were the only laws strictly enforced. These the miners recognised and supported themselves for their own protection.

There was a new shanty built in the centre of the town, as a public hall for concerts and theatrical entertainments, and dozens more of drinking and dancing-saloons. A Salvation Army flag flew over one log hut, and a Roman Catholic cross was raised above another. These were the pioneers of Christianity so far, without, as yet, having any recognised rivals.

There was no prison, for they could not afford to feed prisoners; besides, recognised crimes were

punished as savages punish crime—by death and confiscation.

If a man committed murder without being able to justify the act, he was hanged or shot, and buried at the same time and in the same grave often as his victim. If he could justify himself, he was set at liberty, with the penalty of having to stand drinks round to his judges. If hanged, the commissioners took charge of his and the victim's property until such time as heirs could be discovered.

There was no other crime in Klondyke, except theft or cheating at play. Men and women mixed about, changing partners as the fancy took them, and killing each other when jealous. They had all relapsed into savagedom, without having the controlling advantages of savages—a chief. They worshipped only at one shrine, and that was—Gold.

It was terribly beastly, and made us shiver with horror and disgust, wishing we were out of it all. Yet it had its grotesque and comic sides also, which made us laugh.

There was a Yankee speculator who, besides more legitimate cargo, had shipped a lot of strong, good-looking girls, along with a qualified doctor to testify as to their condition, and a properly ordained parson to marry them.

This business was going on briskly when we arrived. The Yankee acted as father to the maidens, and matrimonial agent, and he prevented, or rather tried his hardest to prevent, any of his charges from leaving the steamer before

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they were properly married and the expenses and fees paid down.

He had hardly been a week in, but already his cheeks were haggard and his hair turning white, for he had not been able to get a wink of sleep the whole time.

He had already got eighty wedded and paid for properly, out of the three hundred that he had shipped, but in spite of his and the parson's watchful and sleepless care, twenty had managed to slip through their hands and elope with young fellows who had lured them over the side and bolted with them without paying a cent.

He had two hundred young, healthy and skittish females still to dispose of, who were in open rebellion at this imprisonment. The banks and river were crowded with suitors, all hard flirting with and winning the hearts of the fair captives, with hardly five thousand dollars amongst the crowd, and the poor, half-crazy speculator's fee was two and three thousand dollars per head.

That was an exciting and laughable scene, if you like. The Yankee, the parson and the doctor, rushing about the deck, trying to keep their cattle in order, and the cattle doing their level best to ruin fair trade and give themselves away for nothing.

There was a greater attempt at style and fashion than had been on our last visit. It was summer, and the boats had brought in muslins for the ladies and other feminine vanities; also flannels and lawn tennis jackets, with white and yellow shoes, for the men. A theatrical company had also come, with a host of cardsharps, sham mining experts,

company promoters and professionals of those kinds. On the place where we moored our boat we had the pleasure of seeing a brace of those sham mining experts dangling from a temporary gallows. Judge Lynch had been dispensing justice on that afternoon.

Near the swinging experts a hoary-headed Salvationist was holding forth to a number of Californian miners who had got up from their cards to listen to his oration. They had been either disturbed by his preaching, or else tired of their game, for the cards were still lying face downward on the ground. The men, however, were listening respectfully enough, and joining lustily in the hymns. The reason of this was that the preacher was the celebrated 'Buck Wheat,' a well-known and wealthy Californian mine owner, who had been converted some months before, and was here to do all the good he could to his former mates.

There were all sorts of people swarming about the streets without intermission. They ate when they felt hungry, if they had gold dust enough to pay, and slept when they were that way disposed. Having no night, business went on constantly, and shops and drink-houses never closed.

There was plenty of money flying round. Men sometimes spent over a hundred pounds a day while waiting for a boat to take them and their gold dust out of the country. It was the biggest state of reckless extravagance, wanton wickedness and senseless rioting that could be imagined.

Our first duty, of course, was to expend the

money we had brought on the provisions and other articles that we required. Paul had given us a careful list, and these we laid in and loaded, with the help of some fellows who were not yet otherwise employed.

When we had done this, Winifred and I set out together on our walk over the town, leaving Harold and Pete to watch on the boat—she to look out for her husband, and I to try if I could find the odd-eyed murderer.

‘I’ll tell you what we shall do first,’ said my companion, as she paused in front of a flaring play bill, and glanced at the contents. It was ‘The Lady of Lyons.’ ‘Let us go to the theatre, and see who are there, and then we can take the round of the shops afterwards. Walters always was mad on romantic plays like this.’

The Town Hall being too small for the present population, the theatrical company had put up a huge tent for the summer, while they were making arrangements for building a larger hall.

I was quite agreeable to this first move, for I was wearying to have another look in at theatrical life. When one is accustomed to town and theatres, even a ‘penny gaff’ becomes a welcome sight to the rover.

But this was no ‘penny gaff,’ as far as entrance fee was concerned, we found when we reached the door. The company had come thus far north to pick up gold dust as well as other people.

Ten dollars was the entrance fee charged to all. There were no private boxes or reserved seats; in fact, there were no seats at all, except for the orchestra: it was standing room only.

Men and women strolled about as they do in the promenade of the Alhambra, or at Earl's Court, while the performance was going on. At convenient corners there were drinking counters put up, with one or two tables and forms for those who liked to use them for cards.

It was only an enlarged drinking and gambling tent, with 'The Lady of Lyons,' some incidental music, and interludes of high kicking and skirt dancing thrown in by way of variety. This had gone on for the past two weeks, and would go on to the end of the summer season, with only some three or four hours' interval between each performance, to let the performers have some slight repose.

The management was coining money, so also were the actors and actresses. Sometimes, when the audience was specially pleased, little bags of gold dust would be shot across the space, and pitched at a favourite, instead of bouquets. She, for it was always a she, liked the gold dust much better than the most tastefully arranged bunch of exotics. The actors generally had to be content with their legitimate pay.

However, as most of the actors were the husbands of the charming fairies who figured as spinsters on the play bills; likewise, as those ladies were generally very honest, hardworked, and faithful wives and mothers, who only were considering their homes and how to keep them, while they smiled so radiantly, and skirt danced so loftily, it did not really matter which *partner* received the gold dust of the simple and enthusiastic diggers.

The performance had begun before we entered. They had reached the part where Claude Melnotte laughs at Colonel Dumas for his Italian, greatly to the amusement of Pauline and her mutton-headed mother. They were a first-class company, take them all in all. Gold diggers, being composed of all classes, get educated in such matters as good singing and acting, and are apt to puncture duffers. Now, duffers, as a rule, prefer long-kept eggs to bullets, as remonstrances against their incapacities.

The egg-shot duffer may survive
That shot to duff galore,
But when a digger plants his plug,
That duffer duffs no more.

‘Winifred,’ said I, suddenly, after Pauline had spoken in the cottage, ‘do you know who is acting Pauline?’

‘Of course,’ answered Winifred, a little impatiently. ‘It is Cora Brooklin. I saw that long ago. Dan Fairmaner is playing first violin in the orchestra, but while you were watching the play I have recognised my husband. Come, let us get nearer to him.’

‘Ah!’ This came on me like an avalanche, for I had been hoping that he had gone under at the White Horse Rapids.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HUSBAND OF WINIFRED

‘DO you see that little fellow behind the bar over there, Tom? The one with the curly hair and the dark moustache, mixing up the decoctions.’

‘Yes,’ I replied, as I gazed stupidly at the little beast. He was no more than five feet four, if that much; the most miserable little scarecrow, with a yellow face and muffle of hair all crumped like a negro’s.

‘That’s my husband,’ Fred Walters.’

I looked at Winifred in wonder. She was at least five inches taller than the withered shrimp she called husband. She could have crushed him and broken his wretched neck with one hand easily.

I guessed he was a dandy, but I thought that, at the least, he had the stature of a fair-sized man, and was something for a girl at least to look at, even if she could not respect him.

But when I saw this little insect, and remembered her melancholy over its absence, I must confess that I wondered with a mighty sadness and surprise. ‘What do you want me to do with

it?' I asked, dazed. 'Lift *it* over the bar and crack it for you, or what? Say the word, Winifred, and I'll make it fact.'

She laughed a hard, mirthless laugh, and then she said,—

'Don't laugh at me, Tom. I did once love, or thought that I loved, *that thing*, and I honoured him too, for my love had made him noble and large in my eyes. You know they say horses have magnifying eyes, else they might despise their masters; so have young girls when they first fall in love. I can see what he is *now* as plainly as you can, but I couldn't once, and that is where the folly and the pity comes in.

I gripped both her hands, and I looked at her blue glasses, for she had them on now. I couldn't see through them to her eyes, but from her voice I knew they were blinded with bitter tears. She gave her head a little toss, and then she said quickly,—

'There, there, Tom, you are a dear, good brother. I'll wait here. You go over to that bar and ask him for a drink. Get into conversation with him, and ask him how he came here and his adventures. He'll tell you fast enough, for he likes to boast and blab when he has a stranger to pour it out upon.'

'But, Winifred, hadn't you best come with me? I don't like to leave you alone in this crowd.'

'Do you think he could recognise me?' she asked.

'Certainly not, with that hat and those glasses on.'

'Then, here goes. You pump him. I'll stand by and listen.'

He was a marvellous little fellow for conceit and self-assurance—a kind of Napoleon Buonaparte, without the brains of a Nap. As I drank with him and hearkened to his brag I could almost have believed in his consequence myself, it was so sincere. If a man is only sincere in his ideas he can almost convince a nation. Frederick Walters believed that he was an irresistible fascinator and conqueror of womankind, and, as far as he had yet proceeded, his ideas seemed to be correct. He informed me, in the most affable manner during that half hour I spent with him, that he had committed matrimony six times at least in his young and fragile life. He had never yet been divorced. Why, he could not exactly say. Perhaps the dear ones expected him back—who knows?

‘Have you got a wife here?’ I asked as calmly as I could.

‘Rather! What do you think? I picked her up at Vancouver; a lady in the public line—public liquor line, I mean. She, as usual, glued on. I touched her as to exes. She responded in a business-like manner. So we came on, and have done well since living in Dawson City. I own the ‘Glut of Gold’ Hotel, which my spouse looks after while I boss this show.’

‘Could you put me and my sister here up at your hotel?’ I asked.

‘Yes; twelve dollars per day each, bed and early coffee included.’

‘As that seems reasonable for Dawson City,’ I answered, ‘we’ll go to your place.’

‘And you can be nowhere else more at home.

The dramatic company here sojourns with us. My wife is the most motherly old gal in the wide creation. Not quite so young as she once was ; not quite so young as my last wife was, poor, helpless thing ! She was lost, I understand, coming after me over the Chilkoot Pass. Women, when they love, are so infatuated that they will go pretty nigh anywhere after the man they are gone on.'

He spoke airily, and with a strong American accent. Winifred gave a slight shrug and shudder as he came to this part.

'Yes,' he prattled on, 'I was a bit soft on that gal, and did foolish things for her. She was useless for a man like me, therefore I had to leave her ; yet she was good, but all-firing foolish in her affections.'

Would I choke the little shrimp, or let him go on ? Winifred was watching Claude Melnotte trying to vindicate himself in Widow Melnotte's cottage, listening to her husband :

'Pauline, by pride angels have fallen ere thy time.'

It was an interesting play, so I let him go on.

'That gal—Winifred was her name—thought so much of me that she would come on after, right up hereabouts. I wanted her to stay in 'Frisco, but she had her notions.'

Claude Melnotte was discoursing with bitter humility,—

'I saw thee amongst the flowers.'

'Wait a bit,' said this shrimp ; 'I'll tell you about my fifth wife, Winifred, afterwards. Meanwhile, just listen to that Claude. Ain't he noble ?'

‘The evil spirit of a better love had power upon me.’

‘That’s it, exactly,’ said Mr Walters. ‘We’re always having some bad spirits knocking about—particularly at Dawson City bars.’

Thirsty customers now arrived, so I had no more conversation with Winifred’s husband for that time.

‘Come,’ whispered Winifred, tugging at my shirt-sleeves; ‘I’ve seen and heard almost enough of this spoony nonsense. Take me outside, Tom.’

The light was dim within the tent where she stood, one small paraffin lamp only illuminating the bar, while a row of lamps were lighting up the stage. This dimness made it an easy matter for her to escape recognition, even although she stood close to the miserable wretch while he so airily revealed his depravity. The ruddy complexion which she now had, so different to her former pallor, would help to disguise her from such careless glances as he sent in her direction. There wasn’t much to be learnt about her figure with that patched grey flannel shirt hiding its grace, nor much to be seen of her golden-brown tresses within the shadows of that old soft felt hat. The blue glasses completed the transformation. She might have been anyone with a sweet mouth, a straight nose, and a firm, round chin. It is by the eyes and the voice that folks are mostly recognised.

Her husband was looking at her a good deal of the time that he was not watching the stage, while speaking to me. He was one of those vicious little vermin, who must ogle and try to fascinate women wherever they are. His attention was divided,

however, between the stage and that uncertain figure with the glasses, and the distant lamp glaring half blinded him, so that I doubt if he could make out any more than that she was feminine from her skirt.

He spoke loud enough about his polygamous habits for several bystanders to hear. He evidently was vastly proud of his successes now that he was beyond the clutches of the law. I could see also, while we stood there, that he was popular with the ladies who were escorted to his counter for drinks; for they hovered round him in preference to the other comers, called him their pretty, smart darling, and beamed upon him much more than they did over the partners who were paying all expenses.

'Wait for another few moments, till the close of this act, and then we can go without attracting notice,' I whispered back. 'I'd like to ask him a few more questions.'

'All right; only I have heard quite enough to take a full hundredweight of sorrow out of my heart. He is no more to me now than a six-week's-opened tin of salmon.'

'Wait; I'd like to be sure he isn't lying.'

'That we can find out from others—from the sixth wife of this odious little modern Bluebeard. You have the address. Let's go there and interview her.'

She waited, however, quietly enough, and then, just before the curtain fell, seeing the coast clear, I called for another long drink, a John Collins, so as to keep him mixing—the first drink I had emptied on the ground.

While he was putting in the different decoctions, I said,—

‘How did you find out about the death of your last spouse, Mr Fraser?’ He had taken a new name with his new wife.

‘Well, it is pretty conclusive, I imagine,’ he replied easily, ‘since she is not here to claim me.’

‘But perhaps she returned to ‘Frisco?’

‘No, stranger; if you knew that gal, you wouldn’t say so. She was obstinate on what she called her duty, and wouldn’t pause, as so many men have done, before the entrance to that long trail. It would be Klondyke or bust with her; therefore I guess she has busted, since she hasn’t reached Klondyke.’

Winifred smiled a much more bitter smile than Pauline had worn when she was taunting Claude Melnotte. As for me, I could hardly keep my hand off my revolver. The callous little demon then had reckoned on her death when he left that letter for her at Juneau.

‘Did you come through the Pass, Mr Fraser?’

‘Not such an all-fired fool as to do that, sir, when my exes were secured round by St Michael. I enjoyed my honeymoon at Sitka with my new old woman, and waited on the spring boat coming round.’

‘But supposing your last wife had come so far safe, what would you have done?’

‘You have all the curiosity of a boy, I perceive, yet I don’t mind giving you the information, as it may be a lesson to you if you ever go in for these mistakes. First place, I didn’t expect she would

get this length ; but supposing she had, I have faith enough in my powers of persuasion to have made her knuckle down to the circumstances and serve in my hotel.'

'You certainly have faith in yourself, sir?'

'I have, and the American who hasn't got that much faith is a phenomenon only fit for a museum. I have more than faith in myself. I have experience in women, and can manage them by tact. Tact is everything with women.'

'It would take a bit of tact to keep two wives in one house at peace, I'm thinking.'

'Not much, so long as you commence right at the start off. It might be a case if the first wife knew and the second didn't, but as I explained matters to Mrs Fraser the sixth before we made our contract, and she consented to take the risks, it would be all plain sailing as far as I am concerned, and that's all the length my tact carries me. Mrs Fraser the sixth possesses the sinews of war, therefore my duty is clearly to stick to her, and let No. Five either knuckle down, or else—get. See now, sonny, how the puzzle works, eh?'

The curtain dropped as he finished his lesson, and the bar was rushed by the dry-mouthed audience. Then we went outside.

CHAPTER XXIII

WINIFRED ASSERTS HERSELF

‘WELL, what do you think of Mr Fraser, Winifred?’ I asked, when we got outside the tent.

‘Think?’ she replied, stretching out her arms as a liberated slave might when his chains had been knocked off. ‘I think him just the most delightful little monster in the world.’ She laughed a little wildly, and then continued excitedly, ‘If he is telling the truth, and that we’ll soon discover, then he deserves a first-class monument, for he has acted like a benevolent king and given me all I panted after—my freedom.’

‘I would not grudge him a first-class funeral if he’d only give me the chance of making him ready for it—after that, the monument, if you liked,’ I answered.

‘Ah, no; let the little, *smart* darling live and prosper, Tom. Let him go on piling up spouses and take them all to Utah, if they care to go, so long as I am left behind. I forgive the past freely—all my sorrows, all his falsehoods and perjuries, even my own extinguished infatuation, and that is harder to do than to forgive his sending me to my death. There, I wipe the slate clean and blow the

little dear a kiss of peace for this great joy. Tom, let us do a waltz to that fellow's concertina. Oh, I am too, too happy to be able to stand still.'

An old digger was sitting in front of his tent playing the concertina to some of his pards who lay at their ease on the ground a short distance away. It was not a waltz tune he was playing, but that didn't matter much. Winifred seized me by the arms and began to turn me about.

The musician saw what we were after, and politely changed his tune at once to 'Sweet Marie,' which, with 'Two little Girls in Blue' and 'Rosey-Posey,' seemed to be great favourites at the dancing-saloons.

My companion waltzed me round half-a-dozen times in the exuberance of her feelings. Then she stopped as suddenly as she had commenced, and drew me away from the admiring crowd of gold-seekers that had begun to cluster round us.

'There, Tom, I am satisfied now. I shall be able to walk sedately after this and not disgrace you by any more foolish outbreaks. Let us go and interview Mrs Fraser the sixth.'

The hotel was not very difficult to find, as there was a stretch of canvas on the side of the log walls with the names of the hotel and owner painted in black letters on it.

'The "Glut of Gold" Hotel—Mrs Fraser, proprietor. American drinks prepared here.'

The building was mainly composed of bar-saloons, and in its arrangement was simple in the extreme, and utterly free from any superfluities in the form of decoration.

Sides of bacon and dried moose-meat hung

against the walls on such parts as were not filled with casks and hogsheads of spirits and wine, whisky, brandy, hollands, and port and sherry wines.

On the shelves were standing bottles of different bitters and syrups, with the other flavourings that are required to produce the mixed drinks which Yankees patronise.

Several loungers were about the bar when we entered ; some sleeping off the effects of their last potations, others getting as rapidly intoxicated as they could.

The hour, however, was a slack one while the theatre was open ; that is, as nearly approaching quietness as Dawson City could be at any hour. We resolved to take advantage of it.

Mrs Fraser the sixth was behind the bar knitting a pair of winter stockings, and welcomed us both with a friendly smile.

She was not young, as her lord had informed us, nor was she beautiful, clean-looking, nor wholesome, but she looked as if she had a glut of gold, if the rings on her swollen fingers, the bangles round her fat arms, and the chains and locketts resting on her expansive chest, were true indexes. She was a dreadfully bloated and drink-sodden mass of purple shapelessness. Her hair, black, dust-filled and untidy, her brow low and bulging, her dark eyes lack-lustre, and her cheeks flabby and veiny.

One glance at her dropsical carcase and degraded countenance was sufficient to inform us that scruple or principle wouldn't trouble her vitiated mind much.

When she struggled to her feet to serve us with

what we had ordered, she showed herself to be almost a giantess in height. Then I no longer wondered that little Fred had won her fancy. I have always seen little men married to big women, and big men being driven by little wives. I began to think her much more suitable for the shrimp than Winifred ever could have been.

I started the conversation by telling her that we had seen Mr Fraser at the theatre and had been asked by him to call.

She was watching Winifred critically as I spoke, and seemed to be studying her.

'Take off them spectacles, my dear, and let me have a look at you. I seem to have met you before. Ever been in Victoria?'

Winifred quietly obeyed this suddenly uttered request, and looked at her successor quietly.

'No; the resemblance has gone along with the spectacles, but for all that, your wife is a taking gal—'

'My sister,' I said, with a blush.

'Ah, your sister, is she? Well, it's only like my dandy little Mormon should find out the prettiest gals and send them here. Do you know, my dear, I never knew such a fellow as he is for getting round gals.'

'He has been entertaining my brother with some of his adventures,' said Winifred, calmly.

'Did he tell you about his six wives, and all alive, somewhere or other—at least four of them are looking out for the blackguard at present. I am the sixth, and I'll take good care he don't get taken from me.'

'Did he marry you, Mrs Fraser?' asked Winifred, coolly.

'What do you take me for, young woman? Of course he married me. We were married at Sitka. We met on the boat coming up, and, for my very life, I couldn't help adoring the smart little darling.'

'Then, of course, he must have deceived you by telling you that he was a single man.'

'Not a bit of it. He is straight and open. I'll not say that he didn't win my affection before he gave me his confidence; and when a woman's heart is stolen, she can't help but follow it, can she?'

She looked so grotesquely foolish as she spoke about love, with her dull eyes cast upwards, and her podgy hand pressing her bulging left side, that it took me all my time to keep from bursting out laughing. Winifred remained coldly composed, however.

'But if you knew him to be a married man what was the use of going through an empty ceremony?'

'This, that if he tries to chuck me I'll have him up for bigamy. But I don't think he will leave me, the dear, sweet boy that he is.'

'Why? Does he love you more than the other five whom he deserted?'

'I think he does,' answered this sentimental sow, with a ponderous sigh; then with a more natural and crafty expression, she continued, 'as everything here belongs to me, and he has only what I give him. Unless he finds enough gold dust to make him independent, I think he will not leave me, and—he doesn't take kindly to pick and shovel work, therefore I'm fairly safe.'

'I think you are, Mrs Fraser. Well, good-night, for we must get back to our boat.'

'Won't you stay till my Fred comes in. You are an old friend of his you say.'

'Not exactly a friend—an acquaintance, if you like.'

'Then, stay. He'll be here presently.'

'Not to-night, Mrs Fraser,' answered Winifred, drawing me along by the arm.

'What name shall I give Fred? He has so many friends you know—particularly amongst the ladies.'

'We had reached the door by this time. I suppose the spirit of mischief was on Winifred, for she paused and looked at the fat old landlady with a broad smile on her pretty mouth; then she said sweetly,—

'Oh, say that No. Five, Winifred, the girl whose bones he thought were bleaching down Chilkoot way, was calling, just for curiosity and nothing else, you know.'

It was too great a startler for the middle-aged sinner. With a startled grunt she flopped down upon her stool, while we hastened away.

'That wasn't like your usual wise self, Winifred. It will set him on your track, and if he hears you have struck gold he may worry you.'

'Let him try it on, that's all,' answered Winifred, with a bold flash in her grey eyes. 'I freely forgive him the wrong he did me, if he keeps out of my sight; but if he comes my way, and tries on any of *his tact*, I shall—'

She paused and looked dangerous.

'What will you do, Winifred?'

She burst out laughing.

'Make a moving spectacle of him in Dawson City. Tom, living with you boys for the past four months has made a perfect athlete of me. I won't shoot Mr Fraser, nor hurt him very much; I shall only publicly chastise him, as a fond parent would a naughty child, and carry him back to the loving arms of No. Six to be consoled.'

We both went back to the boat after this in the happiest of moods—joking and laughing at the comic sights we saw at every turn.

When we told our chums all that we had discovered, my word, didn't they rejoice to hear that Winifred was at liberty.

We had a regular spree of coffee and cigars that night. I call it night, as it was night-time, otherwise we might have thought it afternoon. Winifred drank the coffee with us, then she went into the deck-house and lay down, leaving us boys to camp out on the deck.

After she had gone, we nearly had a royal row about her, but we managed to settle it for the present quietly. Harold started it in his own abrupt style by saying,—

'Now that Winifred has chucked that coon, I'm going to try for her myself.'

I had not thought this of him, for he was always so distant and shy with her. Peter Glen, I knew, was fond of her, therefore I wasn't so much surprised when he said in his doleful manner,—

'I don't think either of us has a show while Tom Prince is on the ground.'

‘Which he means to try and improve,’ I said significantly.

Then we lost our tempers, and spoke angrily to each other, and might have come to blows, only that Winifred put her curly head out of the deck-house door and shouted,—

‘Here, I say, what are you boys jawing about and keeping a fellow from sleeping? Are the mosquitoes not bad enough to-night, eh?’

That rebuke sobered us down, and then in low whispers we entered into a conspiracy.

As Harold had announced his intentions first, so we agreed to give him the first chance. Pete and I would go ashore in the morning and knock about the town, leaving him a free field. If he succeeded, then we would swallow our disappointment like brave men; if he was rejected, we should toss up who should chip in next.

That matter arranged, I lay down to sleep, leaving Pete and Harold the first watch.

Next morning Pete and I went off together, with rather heavy hearts, for Harold was a sturdy, good-looking chap, and like a bulldog for sticking to his aim. If he was rejected, it wouldn’t be for want of pushing, we knew.

We had got our letters on the first day, therefore didn’t need to go to the post office, which was in one of the saloons. Each applicant sorted out the pile and fished out his own from a big box. That is how postal matters are conducted at Dawson City.

There had been none for either Paul or Winifred, a regular pile, though, for us boys. But we left

them to be read when we got back to Ravenwood Creek.

We went everywhere, except to the 'Glut of Gold' Hotel, and I was a bit shy of going there. I sent in Pete, however, and told him to look out for an odd-eyed man. He came back after half-an-hour and said all the eyes there were properly paired as to colour, although several squinted. The murderer didn't squint, he only stared peculiarly.

We went everywhere, and looked at every man in the city and suburbs, I think, without finding the brown-and-blue-eyed man. Then we returned, tired and sadly, to the riverside to learn our fate.

Half-way there we came across an excited and shouting procession of the citizens. They were escorting something along with loud and joyous acclamations.

Nearer they came, bringing the dust of ages with them, and in the centre of that howling dust-cloud we saw our chum, Winifred, racing along with a broken switch in one hand and a most pitiable little object in the other. We knew what had happened without being told. The husband of six living wives had sought an interview, and she was letting him have it according to promise. She had subdued him with many stripes; she had dragged him through the soft mud of the Klondyke River, and floured him with the dust of Dawson City, and now she was taking him home to his amorous No. Six.

She ran like Atalanta after she had picked up the golden apples, for the little shrimp of a polygamist did not appear to weigh any heavier in her hands than an apple of gold would have done. It was

like trailing the sash of a matador over the yellow earth. Her eyes were blazing gloriously in the warm afternoon sunbeams, her teeth were shining like pearls as she laughed, and her face was flushed all over with her exercise, while her rich yellow tresses flew loosely about her.

As for the poor shrimp, he was as a mud-crusted, dust-covered rag in her hands. Fortunately the distance was not great between the river and the 'Glut of Gold' Hotel, or he might have been a corpse as well as a collapsed polygamist.

She reached the door and pitched the limp object inside. Then, folding her arms over her flannel shirt, she addressed the admiring crowd,—

'Boys, you have all heard Mr Fraser talk of his six living wives. I am No. Five—that's all.

She walked quietly back to the boat with us beside her and over a thousand admirers in our track. Her grey flannel shirt was a bit ragged about the arms, and her patched skirt pretty muddy and dusty, yet she was the heroine of the hour in Dawson City.

Before we left she received two thousand offers of marriage, and declined them all with thanks.

Poor old Harold! she had declined his offer also. Then Pete and I agreed we would not be too previous with our offers, but let things simmer down a little. When a girl has rejected two thousand and one good offers she is apt to be slightly high-toned, haughty and hard to please.

CHAPTER XXIV

NUMBER FIVE

I HAVE not been able to say much about my two old chums, Harold and Pete. You see, we were always together in this expedition, and what happened to me, befell them likewise.

Of course, they had their idiosyncrasies, which perhaps I ought to have gone more into in justice to them. These differences of temper, however, did not affect our fortunes in the least. We had no big rows, and when we did squabble a little, either Paul or Winifred managed to stop them before they became serious. We were loving and true chums, who could not do a mean trick to each other for all that earth could offer.

Pete was of a mild and melancholy disposition, who never expected too much out of any scheme, yet that did not prevent him going through what he had taken in hand for all that. He did the work calmly and methodically. He expressed no disappointment if it didn't turn out well ; for, as he said, that was what he expected. Neither did he rejoice over much at our success. It wasn't what he had expected. But we were not out of the wood yet.

'I never had much luck, Tom, and I don't ever expect to have a great deal,' he used to say broodingly. 'Some fellows seem born to get on; you are one of the lucky ones, and I am only sharing your luck; but I don't think it can last with me.'

Winifred was always extra kind to him, and I thought that now she was at liberty he had a better chance than any of us. He was a good and gentle lad, and if he wasn't the best-looking amongst us, girls don't always fix their affections on outward appearances: they look deeper than we boys do. I was sure of one thing about Pete, and that was that he hadn't a bad or selfish instinct in his whole composition.

He said, however, dolefully,—

'No, no, Tom, if any of us boys have a chance with Winifred, it is you. Harold is too John Bullish and gruff; he isn't a courtier, and he cannot do the amount of soft sawder wanted. Neither can I, but you can do just the right amount. What makes her kind to me is pure pity; she can see by the way I look at her how far gone I am, and she is sorry for me—that's all her interest in me.'

I dared not hope so; yet perhaps Pete was right, for he was a pretty observant young man.

Harold certainly had a lot of the Saxon mastiff about him, and held on to his purpose, as a bulldog holds on to a pair of trousers once he gets them between his teeth. It took a deal of slow meditation before he could make up his mind to take up an object; but once he did, he went for it with the most obstinate courage and perseverance. It would not be the first or second 'No' that he would take as

his answer. He would just keep on asking reasons, and pressing for 'Yes' until he got his way, or else was annihilated. He was one of the kind who never could understand the meaning of the word 'defeat.'

A bit of a bore when he got on to an idea, as wild horses could not have dragged it out of his head. Inclined also to grow sulky if he was getting the worst of it, but never to retreat or own up wrong, but yet as generous, brave and enduring as mortal could be.

And this is exactly how he had gone to work on the day we had left him to court Winifred. He had blurted out his affection in a shame-faced, awkward way that looked like blushing shyness. Winifred had been jocular with him at first, and tried to laugh him off; then she grew serious when she saw that he was in savage earnestness, and was gentle with him, but firm in her refusal. She wanted to like him in a sisterly fashion, but no more.

All the forenoon he had kept at her doggedly, until at last he raised her temper, and the pair had their first downright quarrel. Then he gave up when he saw he had driven her to tears, and was filled with remorse.

It was at this unlucky moment that the shrimp-like polygamist appeared on the scene. Winifred had forgiven Harold his cruel persistence, yet the angry passions he had raised were not so easily subdued.

Poor Frederick Walters, or Fraser, had discovered where his former wife was, and came along cheerfully and boldly to offer her a situation in his hotel as assistant barmaid. It was the best offer he was

able to make, and in order to reconquer her he had arrayed himself in his best clothes.

She saw him coming down the street, stepping as Agag did before Samuel—*delicately*, and with an expression of self-assurance and confidence in his own profound *tact* which immediately turned her wrath from Harold.

‘Get me a good stiff sapling, quick, Harold, and I’ll forgive and forget ; here comes my ex-hubby, and I mean to give him a warm reception.’

While Harold was hunting round the boat for the desired rod, the polygamist came straight on, until he reached the bankside. There he stopped, and kissed his hand jauntily at Winifred. Tact suggested, I expect, that this would be the most graceful method of breaking the ice. He stood smiling upon her with his most winning and perfectly-at-ease smile. She looked at him quietly—the dangerous, gentle quietness of a woman with a purpose under the leash.

Conceit must have blinded his tact for that day, or else he would not have paused leering on that bank. He had a couple of chain-guards across his flash vest, and a cluster of blazing rings on his fingers. To display these to the best advantage he began twisting his moustache while he opened the conversation.

‘Well, my ducky, so you have got up at last.’

‘Yes, drakey, I have,’ drawled Winifred, with the most pronounced of Yankee intonations. Harold, who told us this, had found a nice suitable green stick which he had cut on the way up the

river. As he heard her slow, nasal drawl he could hardly keep from laughing.

Some of my readers who have only known the girls of England may imagine our Winifred to be a brazen and forward girl to conduct herself like this. She was not so on ordinary occasions; indeed, she was as gentle as an English girl could be at most times, if not quite so prudish and shy. Colonial and American girls are never quite so shy as our sisters are, and what might sound like cheek in England is unnoticed over there. Besides, this was not an ordinary occasion, and, thanks to Harold's persistent and rude courting, Winifred was not in her customary patient mood.

'Wall,' continued Frederick, the much-wedded, putting one hand into his trouser pocket and rattling some loose coins to show his ease, 'wall, my beauty—for, by George! your journey north has amazingly improved your personal appearance—I guess I need not enter into any embarrassing explanations since it appears you know all about me, eh?'

'Not the slightest need if you own it up, Mr Brigham the Second,' answered Winifred, coolly. 'My number is Five, I understand.'

'Exactly. Oh, yes, I own up frankly that I have no claims upon you.'

'And may I ask what you want?'

'Wall, you see, I talked the matter over with No. Six this morning, and as she is a real generous soul she bears no ill-will towards you. Not the least.'

'Thank No. Six for me, and tell her that

I am greatly obliged to her. Well, what next?’

‘Only this, my dear, that we both agree you might do better as a barmaid in our hotel than working on a boat. Therefore, if you’re willing, I’ve come to take you home.’

Winifred looked round to Harold, and seeing that he had the stick, she said softly,—

‘Give it to me, and don’t interfere.’

‘May I come on board?’ asked the little fellow, fancying that all was settled as he expected it to be.’

‘You may, if you like.’

He stepped daintily along the plank gangway, and was approaching in his best form to salute her, as she stood waiting for him with her hands behind her. Like a tiger-cat she pounced upon him, her hat falling from her fair head as she made the spring.

It was all over with the little man from that moment. The first grip that she took burst asunder his collar and shirt, sending the studs flying; the second was a firmer clutch, for she had him by his woolly mop, and there was no getting away from that grip.

It took some moments to use up the stick, for it was as tough as well as a supple wand. She did not open her lips, but he did enough of that to fill the bank with interested spectators.

‘I never saw a prettier sight in my life,’ said Harold, cheerfully; ‘nor anyone get a more complete hiding in a shorter space of time than that monkey-man got. She trailed him about the deck, not in the least caring about the corners that she

barked his shins against ; nails and rough edges ripped and tore his black coat sleeves and light pants all to ribbons. He was just like a swab of dirty oakum being lashed and knocked about the deck. How the folks on shore yelled with laughter and encouraging cheers as they watched this lightning operation. My word, but we all enjoyed it. She didn't stop to draw a breath when the stick at last broke short in her hand, but made a flying leap with her victim from the deck into the sticky mud. Here she wiped him backwards and forwards until he was clammed all over with the slime, then she darted out with him and raced, as you saw her doing, with him trailing behind her, to the "Glut of Gold" Hotel. Oh, but it was sublime, and did a lot to soothe my disappointment.'

We were all sorry, however, that Winifred had given way to this fit of rage. It was not a very dignified or ladylike exhibition, and on this account she made us promise not to tell Paul anything about it. We promised, and kept our word religiously. Afterwards, we had reason to wish we had told him the whole story, when it was too late, for the little wretch was a venomous reptile when his vanity was outraged, and took care to have his revenge.

We sailed out that evening, however, after all those declarations of love and offers of marriage, so that we saw no more for the time of this martyr to matrimony. Winifred lay on the deck that night watching the banks. She was utterly fagged out, not so much with her exercise the day before, as with the levee she had held. Two thou-

sand emphatic 'No, thank you,' or, 'Declined with best thanks,' are exhausting even to the strongest constitution.

'What a dreadful thing it must be to be born a queen,' remarked Winifred, yawning wearily as she rolled over to a fresh part of the deck.

'How that, Winifred?' we asked.

'Oh, to have to hold all these drawing-rooms and sign all those State papers. It must be killing slavery. Think of the poor old Queen of England having to bob her head for hours at a time to her people, and get her hand mugged and slobbered over. It is positively appalling. Putting up pounds of sugar and quarter pounds of tea in anticipation of a busy Saturday must be balmy ease compared to this royal drudgery.'

After a little time she said,—

'I say, boys, do gather up all those unanswered *billets-doux*, and chuck them overboard before we get down to the creek. I shouldn't like Paul to know that other men are such fools, and I'm too tired out to gather them up myself.'

She slept most of the passage down, and as we hadn't much work to do, for we were drifting down the current, we obeyed her.

We read some of the precious epistles, but got sick of them at last—there was such a sameness about them—therefore we bundled the lot into the water. My word, Winifred was right, men can be tremendous fools sometimes about a woman.

Our own letters from home were satisfactory enough. I have told already what mine were

about: the quarrel between Aunt Calypso and dad, José getting on with her studies—she was thinking at this time about being a doctor or an hospital nurse. Ruth sent me a rose, Conrad a comic sketch, and poor old dad a postal order for three pounds. Just fancy how far three pounds would go in Dawson City, where standing room in the theatre cost two pounds each. Fancy, too, three pounds sent to a millionaire to help him on a bit?

But the intention and the love were all there, you bet, and these were everything to us patched capitalists under the Polar Star. We posted just a short letter each to the old folks at home, telling them to expect us back, *without fail*, next summer, with enough gold to swamp them. I only said,—

‘DEAR DAD,—Twelve thousand dug up already. A couple or so of millions waiting to be lifted. Cheer up!—From your loving son,
‘TOM.’

I thought that would break the news gently. It was a deal better than telling them a long rigmarole of what we had gone through to reach this El Dorado. Pete’s and Harold’s news were equally satisfactory: all were well at home.

‘Haven’t you got any friends to write to you, Winifred?’ I asked her, and she replied, with a hard laugh,—

‘Oh, yes! lots of friends, who will be proud to see me come back with so many dollars’ worth of dust; only they didn’t think much of Frederick

Walters, and kind of cast me off for marrying him. They'll be all right and affectionate now, though, and forgive me for being such a fool when they find out that I am only No. Five.'

CHAPTER XXV

THE RUSH UPON RAVENWOOD

· SEE here, boys, we cannot keep this secret much longer to ourselves. It ain't right.'

These were the first words that Paul greeted us with when we got down to Ravenwood Creek. He was, for him, in a great state of excitement. We could see he had made some important discovery during our absence.

'What is it, Paul?'

'It is something that I have never seen the like of in my life before—a country bristling with gold, in which the fructuous alluvial soil seems scarcer than the stuff that can't grow anything out of itself. Gold here! gold there! gold all round! I chipped off a bit of quartz three pound weight from the cliff. It was rotten and calcined by fires of long ago, so that it crumbled almost in my hand. I crushed it with my hammer against a boulder, and took out thirty ounces of ore from those forty-eight ounces of blending.

'I tell you, it is like rubbing the lamp of Aladdin. The ore is ours by the ton when we like. See what I've gathered out of the ground since you left?'

He took from his pockets a handful of nuggets varying from two to eight ounces each. The largest was ten ounces in weight.

'They were sticking out of the soil, or lying on the sands under the water, fully exposed. My children, we are rich beyond the dreams of avarice.'

We were all very glad to hear that we were rich beyond the '*dreams of avarice*' (*vide* Sir Walter Besant). None of us had the slightest objection to be so, for we were all young and capable of spending a good deal. But what we boys wanted more than nuggets was supper, for we were most morbidly hungry. We had fasted six hours, for, knowing when we should be in, Winifred started cooking on an elaborate scale, and wouldn't let us touch an article until Paul could join us. Consequently, we were starving.

We told Paul how we had got on after he had imparted to us his and our good tidings. He listened attentively and gravely, looking at Winifred earnestly while we told about the landlord of the 'Glut of Gold.' Winifred left us to tell the story. She was sitting, quietly knitting a jersey while we talked.

'I am glad that you are not bound to such a man as that,' said Paul. 'It is better, in such a case, not to be bound. Did you speak to him before you quitted Dawson City?'

'Oh, yes,' replied Winifred, with a blushing and imploring glance at us.

'And you gave him to understand, without any doubt, that you considered yourself free?'

‘I don’t think he can have any delusion on that matter. I was emphatic on the subject, and made it pretty clear, even to him, that we could be nothing to each other.’

She spoke softly, with downcast eyes. I could see she did not care to look at any of us. What hypocrites even the best of girls can be at times.

I was watching her and Paul during that night. Paul was calm and engrossed in this great discovery, not that he loved gold, but because he had the true gold hunter’s instinct.

Then I saw a look in Winifred’s eyes as she shyly watched Paul when he was thinking, and touching the arm of Pete, I drew him outside.

‘You are quite correct, Pete. Winifred won’t have any of us boys. She has fixed her heart on Paul Ravenwood,’ I said sombrely.

‘I saw that half-way up, old boy. Why, she worships the ground he steps over,’ answered Pete, dolefully.

‘And he doesn’t know it?’

‘Not a little bit; but, take my square tip, she’s a woman, and she can manage her own affairs, never fear.’

I went about pretty melancholy for a couple of days after this. I never had considered Paul Ravenwood in the light of a rival. He was much too sober and preoccupied always to bother his head about sentiment.

He was always kind and considerate towards Winifred, calling her his little girl, or his good, brave child, or something of that sort. Anyone could see that he was fond of her in the same way

that he was of us, and no more. He had given us all lessons in shooting, both with the rifle and the revolver, and he was proud, in particular, of her steady hand and sure eye. She gave him cause to be proud and fond of her in a hundred different ways; but pride and affection are different from love. He was not in love with her at all yet in the way she loved him.

I noticed after this that while she was with us she was as free and lively as a boy, but before Paul she grew shy, timid and soft; she would drop her eyelids and flush if he looked at her, but when he was looking in another direction, then she liked nothing better than to watch him.

I was glad I hadn't spoken to her as Harold had done, for while she was the same as ever with us since that day in Dawson City, she took every pretext she could of keeping him at bay, thus *he* had not gained anything by his persistence, but instead he had lost a lot.

However, for the next few weeks we had little enough leisure outside our mines. When we saw how rich they were, we decided to call in help, and get as much work done in the short time left before us of sunlight. We had wealth enough and to spare now, therefore we did not grudge having to disgorge some of it to obtain hired labour.

Paul and Harold took their guns and went through the forest to Dawson City to announce their find and get hands. They were gone four days, and came back leading a small army of hungry prospectors.

'Farewell to quiet now, ah, dear, dear Raven-

wood!' sighed Winifred, as she saw the invaders swarm over the glen with their tents, axes, picks and spades.

She was right. The sweet solitude was no longer ours, and the trees, which had given us such pleasant sheltered walks in the hot noon, were now being ruthlessly and rapidly felled on every side.

Paul managed to secure decent men to work our claims, some on wages at £20 per week, others on half profits. They were all on the half-profit system at the beginning of the second week, when they saw the results of the washing, and working like demons, with hardly a rest.

But outside our radius they were a very mixed and rough horde who took up the vacant claims: honest enough in their dealings and respect for each other's property, but here their notions of propriety and morality stopped. The bad ones raised the echoes with their curses and foul language, or, as the saying is, coloured the atmosphere exceedingly blue, while the greater number had just to listen and endure the tinting as philosophically as they could.

They worked hard, smoked furiously, and drank fusil oil labelled *whisky*, as fish suck water. When they had washed out their '*dirt*' and weighed their '*dust*,' they sat down and had a gamble for each other's pile. It was then the colouring matter spread about, for poker doesn't act upon men as a sedative.

There was no time for washing clothes or faces, and but little wasted in sleep during those remaining days of summer. When they were too fagged

out to work any more they lay on the ground, played cards, and drank until they had won or lost all they had about them, or were overcome by their potations, then they slept for a few hours, and rose, like bears with sore heads, to work for more.

They were a swarthy, dirty, ferocious-looking set of pirates and bushrangers, whom timid souls might easily have screamed at with horror; and yet, amongst those uncouth savages were to be met many who were quite accustomed to the usages of polite society; many who had been brought up to use perfumed baths, teeth powders and silver-backed hair brushes; many who paid their subscriptions to the most select and fashionable clubs of London, Paris, Berlin and New York; some whose names and ages were to be found in *Burke's Peerage* and other catalogues devoted to gartered, ribboned and coronetted members of Adam's race.

But here it was impossible to tell which were the gentlemen and which the plebeians. Often the proletarian was better educated than the patrician, and when one man sputtered out his oaths with their H's decapitated, two could pour them forth complete and rhythmically rounded. They all wore ferocious beards and matted locks; all had the same patched, tattered and dilapidated shirts, pants and battered hats, so that it was utterly impossible to say which was the cream and which the skim milk in that human simmering.

They were arriving and departing, for those miners are a moving set of Arabs. As soon as the claims were all taken up the next lot only worked to get enough to take them elsewhere.

There were women as well as men working, drinking and gambling. A woman can take up a claim as well as a man. Some of these women did this, and hired hands to work for them as soon as they had dug up enough to pay for wages; others stuck *manfully* to their pick and shovel, and rocked a different sort of cradle to that usually rocked by the fair sex.

The banks of the stream were lined with 'sluiceways,' 'tailings' and 'cuts,' and the ground burrowed over with holes. The trees fell crashing down before the axes, and the game retreated to the backwoods in fear and wonderment at this strange din. Explosions were heard as dynamite charges blasted rocks and sent boulders flying from the places where they had rested for ages. All Nature was convulsed and upset, for man had come in search of gold.

Only the seasons ran their ordinary courses without the least respect or consideration for these gold hunters. The longest, hottest day had come and gone, and the short summer was drawing to an end. We knew it from the glorious colours of the clouds when the sun set earlier each day; we could feel it in the night time, when the keen frost bit into our bones. The darkness which was first hardly an hour, thus so softly spreading out as the days rolled on, warned us most significantly to make haste and prepare for the coming night of deadly cold and utter gloom.

We were doing well enough though, for we had our storehouse well packed with provisions and blankets. There was wood enough to last all in

the glen with firewood for the winter. The prudent ones were already felling and packing it up; the careless members would likely desert us for Dawson City as soon as the light failed.

Paul had organised a vigilance committee to keep the disorderly under as much as possible. We had no fears for the claim owners, as self-interest made good citizens of them, and by banding together and doling out stern justice to offenders, we managed to hold our own.

I am sorry to have to say that Ravenwood could not be kept blood-free. There never were many pounds of gold taken from the earth without being paid for by a human life. They call it red gold, and so it is, for every sovereign coined, and every ornament made, has been washed in human gore in their virgin state, before ever they commenced their crime-making career.

I will not tell all the graves that were dug in Ravenwood Glen while we were there, for the murders and the executions that took place were so frequent that they were hardly commented upon. Two men, perhaps, quarrelled over the cards, and one was stretched out, and the survivor tried and punished before he was sober enough to recognise his crime. A thief was caught in the act of sneaking a slice of bacon or a bag of dust, and he was lucky if he got time to make his will or mutter a prayer. This had to be done according to goldfield laws, otherwise no one could have had a moment of safety.

We made money hand over fist, but, alas! at what a sacrifice to our better feelings. We were

like soldiers in active service, and had no room for the weakness of mercy.

By the close of August we were rich enough to have retired, and might have done so only for two reasons. The first was, that Paul had not yet discovered the man he was after, and he had a fixed idea that he would do so that winter; the second reason was, that we could not get away from our claims until the season was too far advanced.

CHAPTER XXVI

A NARROW ESCAPE

FISH were fairly plentiful in the river, and on these, with an occasional wild fowl, we had lived during most of the summer. As the autumn came on we went out hunting in the forests and mountains, out of sight and sound of the mining operations, and there we had good sport, and seldom came back without a load.

Paul was a keen hunter, and being such a dead marksman he seldom missed his aim.

There was a marshy lake about twelve miles over the ranges, which, during the summer months, literally swarmed with water fowl. Many a good bag we got off the borders of that marsh.

In the ranges also we at times came upon larger game, where the snow never melted entirely. Here we were favoured sometimes with the welcome sight of herds of reindeer and moose, and several times were able to stalk them down and secure enough at one shot to stock our larder for a long time. We smoked and dried the salmon trout and deer flesh that we did not want for the day, and kept their skins and antlers as trophies.

Once we came upon a youthful grizzly who had, like ourselves, wandered afar from home. He was a tough customer to tackle, but we did for him also and transformed him into ham.

As for birds, they were in myriads in the forests during the summer season, and made fine eating.

It was delicious to walk through those forests of spruce, pine and poplars. In the marshy parts also the willow trees made quite home-like pictures. But the mosquitoes took away much of the fancy, for they were *en evidence* everywhere and always inclined for a bite. How they must have maddened the poor elks when they were feeding on the juicy grasses of the swampy flats.

Throughout the lower part of our glen there was paying dirt, but as we had the first pick, and Paul had judgment to pick well, our claims yielded most; at least three of them did—those made out in the names of Winifred, Paul and Pcte Glen.

Greatly to his surprise, although he did not express his astonishment, his one was the richest in the whole creek. Out of it alone during that summer we lifted and washed over a hundred thousand pounds' worth of stuff. It wasn't all ours, of course, as we had to share with the Government and our hired miners.

Harold's claim and mine were not quite so productive, yet we got sufficient there also to satisfy both ourselves and the men who were sharing profits with us. There were not so many surprises about this Arctic placer mining as has been in Australia and elsewhere. No very large nuggets were brought up, but for all that the supply was

more constant and exceedingly rich. There were no blank shovel loads, for the ground seemed to be impregnated all over with ore. Our finds began on the surface and went down steadily. Sometimes the nuggets came up sparkling and distinct even before the sluice was used at all; at other times a considerable amount of rocking and washing was required before we could find the dust. Nuggets of all sizes, from particles like pin points up to lumps like small potatoes. We enjoyed the washing and the weighing immensely, for there was always a speculation about it.

Our men used to dig on steadily for three or four days, piling up the earth they had dug into separate mounds; then they took their turns at the sluices. They watched the operations with jealous eyes, and when the results were gathered and weighed out by Paul, he kept one half as our share, and gave the worker the other as his share.

As we had fifty men steadily working on our five claims, and seldom a week passed that each man did not get a hundred or two hundred pounds' worth of dust for his share, I leave you to imagine what we were piling up, and how well pleased we all were with each other. It was not unusual for one man to make five hundred pounds' worth in a week.

Altogether, at the close of the season, when the water froze up and no more washing could be done, we had four hundred and forty-five thousand pounds' worth of gold in our cache, making us each the owner of eighty-nine thousand pounds.

Now this would have been enough to make most

people happy, if gold can, and envied, as gold does always. But, besides this, we had our claims to exploit or sell, therefore there was no use trying to reckon up our possible wealth. We were like Monte Christo or Cecil Rhodes, quite unable to do it, even if we tried ever so hard. Ah! Klondyke is a difficult hole to get into or out of, once you are in, as we found, but there is no mistake about its gold. It is there, you bet!

One afternoon, at the time when darkness came on, about six o'clock, we were lying outside our hut, basking in the warm rays, and watching Winifred as she was cooking our supper.

Paul, Harold and myself had been out on the hunt that day, and had brought home a fine fat buck and six brace of wild ducks. The buck was lying in front of the door, and Pete was plucking the fowls while Winifred was stuffing them. Her shirt sleeves were rolled up, showing a pair of finely-shaped, sun-tanned arms, and beside her a merrily-blazing log fire.

We were pretty well fagged out, for we had a long tramp that day, so we were taking it easy. Our loaded rifles and guns were just where we had laid them beside us.

Paul lay smoking and brooding, with his eyes absently turned towards the sluices where some of the men were washing their stuff. He was brooding on that enemy of his, I knew, for he had the dark look on his face; brooding on the past misery and disappointment, utterly unconscious and unheeding of that sweet, lovely girl beside him, who would have laid down her life to have made him happy.

I watched him and her for a few minutes, wondering why any man could be so blind and so foolish as to think anything about revenge, when love was waiting and wearying to make him happy.

With an impatient groan I turned to look at the yellowing sky over behind the other side of the gully.

The gully was somewhere about three hundred yards wide at this part. Over against where we lay rose a crag of discoloured quartz, the cliff from which Paul had broken the gold-bearing specimen he had told us about. We had not exploited that yet.

A mass of greenery covered its summit and hung over its upper face. The sun behind us was lighting up this cliff with a ruddy light that made it glow like an unwashed gold-lump.

I was watching it dreamily, and thinking how much of the ore was there, and how little one gets to care about it when they have such a glut of gold as we had.

A glut of gold. As the words shot through my mind, my thoughts rushed to Dawson City and the little polygamist. I wondered if he had been able to live down his disgrace, or had he been forced to quit the town.

All at once my eyes were caught by a sudden flash of light that darted out of a cavity between the leaves. It was a short, straight gleam, but it rested steady and pointed directly in our direction.

Ah! I knew next second what it was—the barrel of a rifle being aimed at us—aimed at Winifred as she stood by the door.



Poor Pete Glen on the earth and Winifred beside him.

'Winifred, for God's sake drop, or you'll be shot !'
I yelled as I flung my rifle to my shoulder and fired at the straight sparkle without a pause.

I was pretty quick, for Paul had taught me a few tricks with the gun, and this was one of them—never to linger over an aim.

As I fired, I saw a puff of smoke burst from the rifle opposite, and then, before the report came to answer mine, I heard a low cry behind me, but before that I knew the bullet was sped, for I felt it singing past my ear. We must have fired simultaneously.

I sprang up and looked behind, to see poor old Pete Glen on the earth and Winifred beside him, holding him in her arms. It appeared that she had done as I shouted for her to do, while poor Pete had leapt up and received the bullet meant for her.

'Are you hurt, Winifred?' I asked in an agony.

'No, but Pete is dead I think.'

'Come, Harold, let's catch this wretch,' I shouted as I rushed down the bank and across the creek.

There were a dozen men after me as I bounded over the rocks, and went up the face of that crag quicker than ever I had mounted shrouds. Two minutes couldn't have passed before I had slung myself over the summit and found myself on the top of the ruffian.

It was the miserable polygamist, and as dead as a herring. I had taken him at the right instant, while his eye was on the sight, and sent my bullet straight through that eye into his brains.

He lay amongst the soft moss, with the blood running over his face from his eye, but, otherwise, as

peaceful looking as if he had fallen asleep in a pleasant frame of mind.

I was glad that I had killed this wretched hound ; thinking of Pete, I could have scalped him also with pleasure. What was his mischief-making life compared to that of our Pete ?

'Below there,' I shouted, looking out to where Harold and the others were scrambling up. 'I've got the criminal, and I think he won't do any more shooting. Catch the carcass as I heave it over.'

I drew the light weight from that mossy nest, and slid it over the cliff while they waited below to catch it.

Then the procession went back, with the body between them, while I brought up the rear with the rifle that had done the damage.

When we got back I found that they had taken Pete inside the hut. He wasn't dead, but badly hit. The bullet had smashed his right shoulder and broken his collar bone, and it had gone right through him and buried itself in the log wall just where Winifred had been standing.

It had been a narrow escape for her and a very close shave for him. We had a medical man amongst the diggers. He plugged and bandaged up the wound properly, and told us that half an inch lower would have been mortal.

As it was, poor Pete had a bad time of it, and was for six weeks on his back after he got over the delirium and fever. Before he was able to stand again the Arctic night had closed upon us, with all its horrors.

He said, though, afterwards, that he would have

liked to go over it again for the sake of the nursing. How gentle and womanly Winifred was through it all. She never left his side, but watched him like a lynx.

My word ! we were all glad now that we had such a mate with us, for none of us could have pulled him through the way she did. I think her splendid behaviour began to open the blinkers of Paul, for he began to look at her more and brood a deal less than he had done formerly.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE TRAIL

TWENTY of our men left us and returned to Dawson City at the beginning of the winter, along with about two-thirds of the rest of the population of Ravenwood Creek. They left just before a heavy fall of snow, and only a third of their number reached the city; the rest were lost and buried in the snowdrift, to lie there until the next summer revealed their bodies and bags of gold dust.

Not many had taken the precautions that we had done to provide against the winter. In the summer it had been so hot that they forgot the intensity of cold, with the dreadful blizzards and snowstorms of the Chilkoot Pass. They had now to suffer for that forgetfulness. No words can describe the fury of the gales which swooped down upon us even in that sheltered valley; the horrible intensity of cold, without even the blast to accentuate it; the awful penetrating subtlety of that ice-wind.

Dante makes Hell the extremes of heat and cold. Near the Arctic Circle is the quarter where

the Hades of Dante lies. To us, who had been wise, it seemed horrible to endure at the first. We had been roasted during the mid-day hours of summer, tanned like Indians, and almost devoured by fierce legions of mosquitoes, the like of which does not exist in any other part of mosquitodom. There are tiger mosquitoes in Queensland and amongst the swamps of upper Africa—picadores of the pricking tribe, who can draw blood through a doe-skin pair of breeches or the tissues of an interviewer. But the mosquitoes of the Arctic regions could have bled a German prince or a Yankee literary agent without an effort, and for impervious hides these beat the rhinoceros and the crocodile, I have heard dad say. We had been baked almost to a condition of crispness for the past three months, and now we were to be iced for nine.

Just fancy the change. Three months in the oven and nine months in the refrigerating apartment.

Dad told me that he had gone down to the refrigerating place once in the Red Sea, when there was a fair wind in their rear, and that he found it rather comfortable than otherwise.

I daresay. To have an icecream is all right on a hot summer day while you are swallowing it; to be plunged amongst snow after a Russian hot bath is simply delightful and invigorating; but that is not the cold that came upon us.

At the last it certainly came down with one fell fling, and stayed with us after that for nine long months. At first, however, it came on insidiously

and sneakingly—a blazing-hot day, then a marrow-piercing night. The land was locked in ice in the morning, weltering in miserable slush at mid-day, to be fastened up again at night. No mortal frame could get used to that kind of treatment.

The sun left us with diabolical deliberation, just like the way the pendulum sword, which Edgar Allan Poe describes, used to descend on the agonised captive—one inch lower each day.

Yet that wasn't getting used to the kind of cold that was coming on with giant strides. When the sun went down we were chilled certainly, and could find little comfort in our furs, our stove or our blankets ; but the next day warmed us up somewhat. It was only when the sun looked at us with a bleared, bloodshot, chilly glance that we got to gather where we were.

And then the first supernal blizzard came down, with its attending demons of snow, sleet, hail, rain, pieces of decayed icebergs, quartz lumps and gritty gravel ; when the trees fell down and made wings of their branches ; when mountains seemed to collapse, disintegrate and spin about our ears ; when the whole world felt going to chaos, with a howling and a screaming and a banging like the end of time ; then we began to realise our strange position. Yes, we shivered and trembled before that stramash and mingling of the elements ; there was no getting out of it. We had to recognise that we were simple atoms in the grasp of Providence. Pete lay quiescent through all that first demonstration of robust Nature. We almost wished we could have done the same.

But we had to work and prepare for what was coming after. We knew that this was only a preliminary flourish of the Arctic tragedy in which we had to play our parts as supernumeraries. When the first snow fell, it fell four feet six inches in six hours. We got outside and plastered it all over our walls. We dug pathways through it, cleared our wood pile, and stuck the debris against the sides of our abode. While we were working it did its best to freeze. An hour afterwards it was like a sheeting of cast metal round our hut.

But it had stopped up the crevices and air-holes. We had only one for ventilation, and another through our stove pipe: these we kept clear.

We had a lot of work to do for others as well as for ourselves. There were three foolish women, who owned valuable claims and much gold dust, who had not thought even of building a hut. They had not progressed beyond their tents. We took these three foolish virgins into our hut for the winter, also as many of our own men as we could accommodate. It was a packed house of refuge that winter, I can tell you—packed liked sardines we were when we slept amongst the furs. We didn't study ceremony much then, you bet.

Awful wasn't the word for it, yet we were a jolly enough party, and as we had no room for quarrelling, we consented to agree and be happy as best we could.

Of course the weather was not *always* 'blizzarding,' although it very often was up to some diabolical eccentricity of this sort. There were

days and nights when it was serene and deathly still, when no whisper came from the vast waste, and not a twig crackled in the snow-clad forest.

Our shortest day lasted about two hours of a ghostly kind of light, and the rest of the twenty-four hours were night. When the sky was clear, we could see the stars burning and flashing in the black space with a vivid intensity. The moon also never left us from the hour it first appeared a thin crescent until its disappearance. It circled round the upper space, growing from a narrow sickle till it shone full and white upon the white earth, and then gradually waned. The Northern Lights flung up their tinted streamers and rays and shooting flames like fireworks, until the whole heavens were filled with flames. These were the fancy-dress ball nights of this Arctic region.

We had all plenty of work to keep us occupied. We continued our mining operations whenever the wind was not too demonstrative; building and keeping fires burning in the holes to melt the ice down a few inches. While one party dug out the thawed earth, the other was walking round another hole, with all his blankets and furs wrapped about him, keeping his fire roaring. These excavations were piled up in separate mounds to be washed when the river thawed.

This, of course, necessitated a vast amount of wood cutting and trailing, hard enough work, but it kept us from sitting down and brooding, or going melancholy mad, as some might have done, with the awful cold and darkness.

All the rivers, mountain torrents and lakes

were frozen hard and thickly, with sixteen and twenty feet of snow upon them. This snow had frozen hard again, and was as solid as ice, and often, with its drifting, as smooth as a skating rink.

One part of the river we kept open, however, all that winter by constant exertion. After the different snowstorms were over, we had to dig and carry the fresh layer up the sides of the excavation, until at last that hole looked like a deep, wide quarry.

Our reason for taking all this trouble was that we might get fresh fish. They came in vast shoals to this hole, and were easily caught, so that as long as we could keep this aperture free from ice there was no danger about any of us being absolutely starved, even if our other provisions ran short. Large game were also to be found now, prowling about in a hungry state that made them exceedingly bold. Moose, caribou, elk and other kinds of venison, came down from the mountains to the spruce and pine woods to feed, or were chased along by packs of famished wolves. When we went out to hunt in the winter we took our sledges with us, and went in bands, as those wolves were no joke for a small party to encounter.

Winifred had not looked at the body of her sham husband, nor did she ever mention him afterwards. He had paid his debts, as far as a guilty man can do when he gives his life, so there was an end of him. We buried him in a part of the wood which we had made a general graveyard of,

and where a good number of executed criminals and their victims were already laid.

And we had more to bury before the winter was over, for no warnings appear to influence some natures.

With a temperature at sixty or seventy degrees below zero, no human being can face it exposed and live. Yet some of these reckless men would venture outside with their faces and necks exposed, the consequence being frost-burning and death. Sometimes a man would go into the wood for fuel, and be found there dead and as stiff as frozen mutton; others escaped with the loss of their ears, noses, hands or feet, these members breaking and tumbling off like dry twigs.

Only constant and violent exercise and hard work could have kept any of us alive in that low temperature, with the very thickest and warmest mufflings we could carry. When we ventured outside we had our faces covered up to the eyes, and the eyes protected by our snow-glasses. There was no difference between the women and men as to outward appearance. All wore fur trousers, jackets and caps that covered the head and ears, with high, big sea-boots over their knees.

None of us washed much during that winter. The ladies certainly tried to do a little of that sort by getting snow, and using that to rub their hands and faces. As for thinking of changing our underclothing more than once in three or four months it would have been considered perfectly outrageous. I had brought six

thick flannel shirts with me, and gave three of these to Winifred for her winter use. I don't know how she got on with her stock, but I wore two of mine at once, and the only alteration I made that winter was to put the upper one in the place of the undershirt one day when I had the hut to myself.

Being all so busy, we had no time to take another trip into Dawson City until the month of February, when, finding ourselves running short of flour and salt, one calm moonlight evening a dozen of us packed our sledges with frozen venison and fish to swap for what we wanted, and, mounting our skates, we set off up the river.

Paul, Winifred and myself made up part of the company. Paul was going to have another search for his old enemy, and Winifred went, I fancy, to look after him.

There had been nothing like courting yet between the pair, but we could all see that Paul was beginning to wake up to the fact that she was a winsome and lovely young woman. I don't think he noticed, as everyone else did, how devotedly fond she was of him. His former experience had, I fancy, made him have but a humble opinion of his own powers of attraction. When men grow up to thirty they seem to get more modest and humble about their personal qualities than are boys of nineteen.

Many of the other women shared Winifred's admiration for Paul, and would have been greatly pleased to have taken her place; but, as few of the men about the creek could compare with him

for strength and clear-headedness, not one of the women could hold a candle to Winifred. They had the discrimination to know this, too, and the wisdom not to attempt any competition.

You bet, Winifred was not blind to the fact that Paul was growing fond of her in the way she wanted. A kind of proud, self-satisfied air was about her now that had been wanting before. She was waiting, without seeming to be in the least hurry, for him to make up his mind ; waiting, but not idly, for every day she spun fresh meshes of tenderness round him ; so that, while he thought that revenge, or, as he considered it to be, justice, occupied the biggest half of his heart, it was gradually being swamped out by the image of Winifred.

Of course, we boys had long before this got rid of all our vain aspirations. At first it was like drawing a tooth, a bit painful, but now we were quite satisfied to have her as our sister. This she would always be, we were sure of, as we were sure that Paul would always be a big wise brother to us.

All I wished for now was that Winifred would succeed in making him forget the past altogether. I hoped that he would never meet his enemy, for he was too good a man to have the blood of even one enemy on his hands. It would be better for him if they never crossed each other.

But that was the one faulty spot about Paul. It was the one inconsistent point about his otherwise good and noble nature.

Well, we set out on our journey on this biting,

but calm, night, all in good spirits, with the exception of Paul and Winifred : he went along silently, like a redskin on the trail, and she filled with anxiety.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

AN INDIAN GAME

IT was a splendid, if cold, night, and the moon was at the full, shining calmly and serenely upon us and making our road clear. The snow, also, was firm as granite under our skates and level the whole way, so that we spun along in fine style.

About half way the Aurora Borealis began flaring up the sky in streaks of lurid flame, and treated us to one of the finest and most weird manifestations I had yet seen—blue, scarlet, green, yellow and white flames shot up from the horizon to the moon above. They mingled and lapped above each other, growing more luminous every second, as if a new set of suns were about to rise, until at last they became so dazzlingly bright that we could hardly look at them. Then, just as we sighted the city, they began to fade away, until we were left with only the cold moon to steer us.

Dawson City looked dead and deserted as we saw it from the distance, spread out like mounds of snow. They had cleared the streets, as well as

they could, regularly, so that at present, with the huge mountains of snow all round it, it looked to be on a lower level than the river.

All the doors were closed and hung with blankets, and the windows hermetically sealed up with ice and snow, which accounted for no lights being seen. But, if only a passing straggler rushed now and again along between the snow-lanes, inside the *hotels* and drinking-huts they were all alive and busy—that is, those who had money or gold dust; the others were waiting interment in their huts and tents.

It was a town of wanton riot still inside the the saloons, where the whisky was plentiful; outside, in the suburbs—the tented suburbs—men and women, alas! also infants in some tents, lay stiff and uncared for. They would have starved to death for lack of food, these poor outcasts and gold seekers, only that King Frost had breathed upon their hearts and sent them to an eternal sleep quietly.

No one could help them, even if they had been willing, for provisions had again run short—only whisky was plentiful still to those who could pay for it in Dawson City. Those who could pay were now living on it almost exclusively, and I need not tell you what that meant.

Those poor frozen corpses could not be buried now, as no pick or spade could reach the ground, therefore they had lain as they had fallen for months.

We found the inhabitants in a condition of almost absolute famine when we arrived. Flour and

beans were only to be had for almost their weight in gold. Only the ice-locked millionaires now could afford to take bread or vegetables with their bacon or tinned meat; ordinary capitalists had to do without these luxuries.

As for the thousands who had failed to make more than wages on the goldfields during the summer, starvation was their portion. The most charitable heart in the world could not possibly have helped these doomed ones. All the stores left in Dawson City could not have fed its surviving inhabitants on full fare for a fortnight, and they had three months yet before they could hope to get fresh provisions in.

This was terrible news for us to listen to. When a town is environed by a human enemy there is always the last chance left—capitulation. But the enemy that had isolated the Klondyke region left no alternative. If they could not hold out, they must die. There was no surrender, with hope behind it. Already half the people who had rushed so bravely to the field were lying dead and unburied round the city and outlying districts. I fancy those who had rushed to winter in the township were the worst off, for we had not suffered anything of that kind yet. We were compelled to give our moose and deer meat to the stores for a very little flour and salt. They were grateful for what we had brought in—much more grateful than if we had offered money. The city was replete with gold dust and dollars: it was food they wanted now, not dust. After negotiating our business, we followed Paul through the public-

houses and saloons. What weird and grim sights greeted us there.

Men, with emaciated faces and sunken eyes, throwing down ounces of gold dust, and drinking raw spirits to keep up their strength. They had drunk all the beer, stout and wines; there was only the fiery spirits left to drink. Women, with painted faces, like skeletons tinted, too faint to dance any longer: they could only sit and drink themselves imbecile.

Men, young six months ago, now looking haggard and aged; women, fresh girls six months ago, now withered hags. On each counter stood a set of small weighing scales. They were serving out drinks now for gold dust instead of dollars, and food for its equal weight of gold.

Every one in these saloons had gold—loads of gold dust—and they didn't appear to care a bit about it. Men still sat playing poker, from force of habit, languidly, for money, but they pocketed their winnings with real instead of affected indifference. A hot plate of ham and eggs introduced suddenly into any of those assemblies would have caused wholesale murder. The richest man in Dawson City was reduced to quarter fare, and the others to what they could grab, even at the risk of being lynched.

We followed Paul from one house to another, looking at these gruesome sights of men and women drifting into senile idiocy from drink without food, while he watched each face and listened to each voice keenly.

It was at the 'Glut of Gold Hotel' he ended his

quest. Strange how that little polygamist seemed to be linked with us.

We had gone in and seen the usual crowd of food wanters and drink victims. Round the stove the crowd was more closely packed, doing their hardest to warm up their starved bodies.

Mrs Fraser the sixth sat behind the bar as usual, but there was a change in her. She was no longer bloated and fat; she was waxy tinted and flabby in the face, with hanging cheeks and bulging body. Her fingers were skinny and knuckly, and her eyes yellow and dim.

No sides of bacon now hung on the walls, only the nails that had supported them. These articles of diet may have been removed so as not to aggravate the hungry customers, but from certain evidences and signs in Mrs Fraser and her boarders, food had not been plentiful there of late.

At a large centre table several men and women were sitting playing cards. Bags of gold dust lay alongside each player's glass, and a good deal of it was being lost and won.

But there was little concentration or interest shown in the game: they might as well have been playing for tokens for all the avidity they displayed.

It was only gold they were playing for, and gold at this time was a drug in the market at Dawson City.

Paul ordered drinks for the good of the house as he had done at the other places, and while the landlady was serving it out we looked around.

Poor Widow Fraser the sixth! she was in the

last stages of Bright's disease, and could hardly support her bulky frame as she placed the drinks before us with trembling hands. Her mind seemed gone also, for she gave no token of recognition, although she looked at both Winifred and me. With a weary groan she put Paul's dollars into the till, and sank upon her chair like a half-galvanized corpse.

Amongst the indifferent players at the table there were two who attracted my attention, simply because they nodded in our direction and gave us wan smiles of recognition. I had to look for a moment in doubt before their individuality dawned upon me.

Gracious! They were the spectres of Dan Fairmaner and Cora Brooklin. What miserable wrecks they were. Cora had lost all her sleek plumpness, and although she had rouged and powdered her face lavishly, the paint could not conceal the ravages of disease or want. As for Dan, he was merely a skinful of bones, with his hair bleached grey.

Paul had nodded back to them, and was now regarding fixedly a snowy-haired man who sat by the side of Cora.

He was, like Dan, wofully pinched and attenuated, with black circles under his eyes and a skin like stained ivory. A finely featured man, somewhat resembling Dan, yet looking years older. One of his thin hands rested on some cards which he had drawn, but not yet lifted, and the fingers glistened with diamond rings. His moustache was grizzly, but the hair, which he wore long, was snowy white.

He was drooping weakly in his chair, with his chin on his chest and his heavy bistre lids over his eyes. A classic face it was, with the appearance about it of a dying soldier.

Cora, who was as usual splendidly costumed, touched her companion and whispered something to him that seemed to wake him. He started up with a spasm of horror or fear twitching his face, while his hand slid behind his back as he glanced in our direction, then he placed both his hands on the table and crossed them meekly.

For Paul had him covered with his revolver. There was no need to speculate as to who he was when he looked at us, for the lamp shone upon a brown and a blue eye glaring from the one face.

'So we meet at last,' cried Paul, striding over to him, and looking at him with ferocious hatred.

'That's so,' returned the other, weariedly. 'I've grown white-headed skedaddling from you; but there was no getting out of Klondyke, so I guess I must face the music at last.'

'Don't degrade yourself by punishing him, Paul,' cried Winifred, clasping Paul by the arm, and thinking he was going to shoot. 'Leave him to Heaven.'

'Hush, child, I must do my duty towards this murderer. He has evaded justice too long. He must not escape this time.'

'Right, you are, sir,' replied the man, indifferently. 'I am about sick tired of this life. Only as Brer Dan here has been boasting of your skill at cards, I'd like to play you one game, just to see which is the better man. Let us play Indian—my life

against my freedom. It will be some excitement in this dead hole?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Paul.

‘This: that if I win the game, we cry quits as to the past; if you win, my body is yours. Are you willing?’

Paul thought for a moment and then he said,—

‘Yes, I’ll play you on these terms. If you win, I shall pardon the past; if I win, I shall kill you. Call the boys round till I explain how we stand.’

‘No; give me a chance. Make your explanation afterwards, if I lose. I won’t contradict you in that case. You are my witness, Dan.’

‘Yes,’ responded Dan; ‘and, see here, Jake Thomas may be a bad man in some things, but in paying his stakes I’ve always found him straight.’

‘As you like,’ answered Paul, sternly.

‘And, see here, boys, before you commence, give up both your weapons to the gal there to hold, so that there may be no quarrelling during play; also, as it is a considerably big stake, divide it as you go on, Indian way.’

‘I don’t quite understand,’ said Paul.

‘Why, this,’ replied Dan. ‘When Indians gamble for their bodies, they do it in by degrees, a finger at a time, then a hand, and next an arm, and so on; it tends to make the game more interesting.’

Jake shuddered slightly, then he said,—

‘Yes, perhaps that would be best, only I’d as soon lose my life outright as be maimed.’

‘You’ll lose your life when you play with *me*, never fear,’ said Paul, sombrely, as they prepared to begin the game.

It was the same thing that had occurred on board the ship. A committee was organised to see fair play. The committee, to whom Dan explained the position, entered into it with zest. It was a novelty to play for lives yet in Dawson City, although the game is common amongst the Indians when they have lost all their other property.

The men woke up from their lethargy of hungry weakness, and supplying themselves with fresh drinks, crowded round to watch.

Both were calm as Stoics as they shuffled and drew the cards. Dan also was calm, but keenly attentive.

'First game lost. My little finger on the left hand,' said Jake, quietly jotting it down on his sheet of paper.

'First finger lost,' murmured Dan, also marking it down.

I shall always love Paul, yet I was nearly hating him for the slow torture which he made his enemy suffer on that night. It must have been worse than the rack for Jake Thomas as Paul played with him like a cat with a mouse, and Winifred watched Paul with wondering pity and pain.

He might have ended the infernal game in half the time, for he was this man's master as he had been Dan's. Both Dan and Cora, and, for that matter, Jake, looked on him with the deepest admiration; all the while he remained cold as the ice outside, and, seemingly, as pitiless. He had suffered eight or nine years of misery at this man's hands; he now concentrated an eternity into two long hours.



Both were calm as Stoics as they shuffled and drew the cards.

Page 276.

He won the five fingers of the left hand, then let the poor wretch get three back, and so on, all through, slowly, surely winning, yet with such elaborate and cunning uncertainty as to keep the man hovering between hope and despair.

Paul had a lot to wipe off; but I felt sick as I watched him doing it. The damp dew stood out in beads on Jake's ivory forehead as he felt himself being drawn in. Yet he was plucky, and did not show any other emotion than those cold drops bursting out of his strained heart to his forehead and nose.

'Ah! Paul, my heart will break if this game lasts much longer,' whispered Winifred in his ear. Then he turned on her a lurid side glance, and answered softly,—

'All right, little girl, I'll end it for your sake.'

After this he played rapidly, and Jake won no more. In ten minutes more Jake's last little toe had passed into the possession of Paul. Then both flung down their cards, and stood up facing each other with cold, white faces.

'Go on,' said Jake, folding his arms. 'Explain to the boys why you want my life, and then finish it.'

'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

It was Winifred who said these words in a clear, loud voice. At the words Paul looked troubled; then he sat down and bent his head.

'Go on,' said Jake, harshly. 'I am ready.'

'Paul, dear, dear Paul! sell him to me,' said Winifred, bending over the bent head of Paul, and

speaking in a thrilling voice. 'For the sake of our blessed Redeemer, go no farther in this business.'

'What can you offer, child, to buy justice? His life is forfeit.'

'All I own in the world—my full share of the mines.'

'What is that to *me* ?'

'Take my life for his ; only let him go for your soul's sake, oh, dearest Paul !'

'Agreed,' cried Paul, suddenly rising and putting his arms about her. 'I take your life for his, Winifred—there, he can go. I am done with him for ever !'

'Thank God !' gasped Winifred, and then, girl-like, of course, she fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE END

THERE is not much more to tell that would interest you.

We lived and worked at Ravenwood Creek until the Yukon River had thawed and traffic was once again resumed. Then, putting on men that we could trust, and ensuring their fidelity by giving them shares in the mines, we took our passage out and steamed down to Vancouver with our gold dust.

My word! All the crowd that perished in the Klondyke district that winter made little or no decrease on the number of the inhabitants. Thousands were rushing in to fill the gaps, just as hopefully and heedlessly as the thousands who were at rest under the swampy soil. Napoleon never wanted an army; no matter how many hundred thousands were slaughtered in his service, his numbers kept up.

The Gold Fiend is equally successful in getting recruits, and almost as expeditious as Napoleon was in polishing them off.

We had drawn the lucky numbers, however, and had to begin cares of another description, namely, to tackle and keep at bay the begging-letter writers who beset and harass the lives of the monied.

Paul and Winifred were married in New York, and Harold was chosen best man. Then, after we had enjoyed ourselves for a while there, we trooped across to Paris, where all good Americans go when they have made their piles ; and after that drifted back once more to dear old England.

We united business with our pleasures as we went along, and turned over a great deal more money company promoting than we had ever done in gold digging. I have long ago given up counting my income. I put it down at a certain figure for the benefit of the income-tax people, because they must have figures to keep their clerks counting ; but, until now, I didn't know, any more than Cecil Rhodes knows himself how much he makes, or the subjects of Queen Victoria are likely to know how much the dear old lady is really worth. We can only speculate at our leisure, and—give it up.

Aunt Calypso and dad were still sulking with each other when I got home, but I soon put these matters to rights. I made them friends first with a little diplomacy ; then, before they had time to break out again, I transported dad to southern Italy, where he liked to live, and aunty to her paradise in Paris.

I did more for aunty, poor dear, for I got her a rich and young husband. Harold took a fancy to

her and married her, and now she considers no man the equal of Harold for true manliness and intellect. Auntie never could have a favourite who was not intellectual. They are fairly happy together, Auntie Calypso and Harold, my nunkey chum.

Pete Glen was all right before we left Klondyke. He picked up with a nice quiet young lady belonging to his father's church, and *they are* happy together, and no mistake.

I'm not married yet, but I hope I won't be long a bachelor, now that I have unlimited funds.

If I could only get hold of a girl like Winifred, I wouldn't pause a moment ; yet, perhaps she isn't a phenomenon—I'm looking about.

José is doing well. She is going to be an artist now, and wants to go to Paris. Well, I can serve her that way also, if she is so disposed.

I met poor old Billy Cane one morning in Clapham, working as second man to a dust cart. I couldn't stand *that* kind of life for my old chum, so I immediately bought him off, and set him up as my private secretary. Fancy Billy Cane a private secretary, and also just fancy Tom Prince wanting such an incubus hanging round. I'll tell you how we do. We employ an elderly typewriter, who answers all correspondence. As Napoleon said about his second empress, 'She is not beautiful, but she is perfectly safe.' We go out, and she does the special correspondence. I have pensioned off the father of Billy Cane. I give him twenty-five shillings weekly, with free board, to lecture on Clapham Common on Sunday afternoons. He

does it with energy and nerve, like the Ironsides of Oliver Cromwell.

Let me see, is there anyone else to account for in this narrative? Well, there is Captain Swift. He got a new ship built for him, and he is still on the briny.

Billy's aunt and uncle. Ah! that poor old uncle. He was singing one night at the usual house in Gravesend, when something went wrong with his neck; he gave a jerk and sank backwards and never lifted any more. Billy's aunt still runs the lodging-house, only we have lately furnished it a bit more stylish for the old lady.

For myself, I have had some adventures. I want more. Money is not all in all to a young man. What he wants is adventure. I don't exactly know where I'll hie to next, but I'll let you know in good time.

Meanwhile, dear readers, 'Au revoir, but not good-bye.'

THE END

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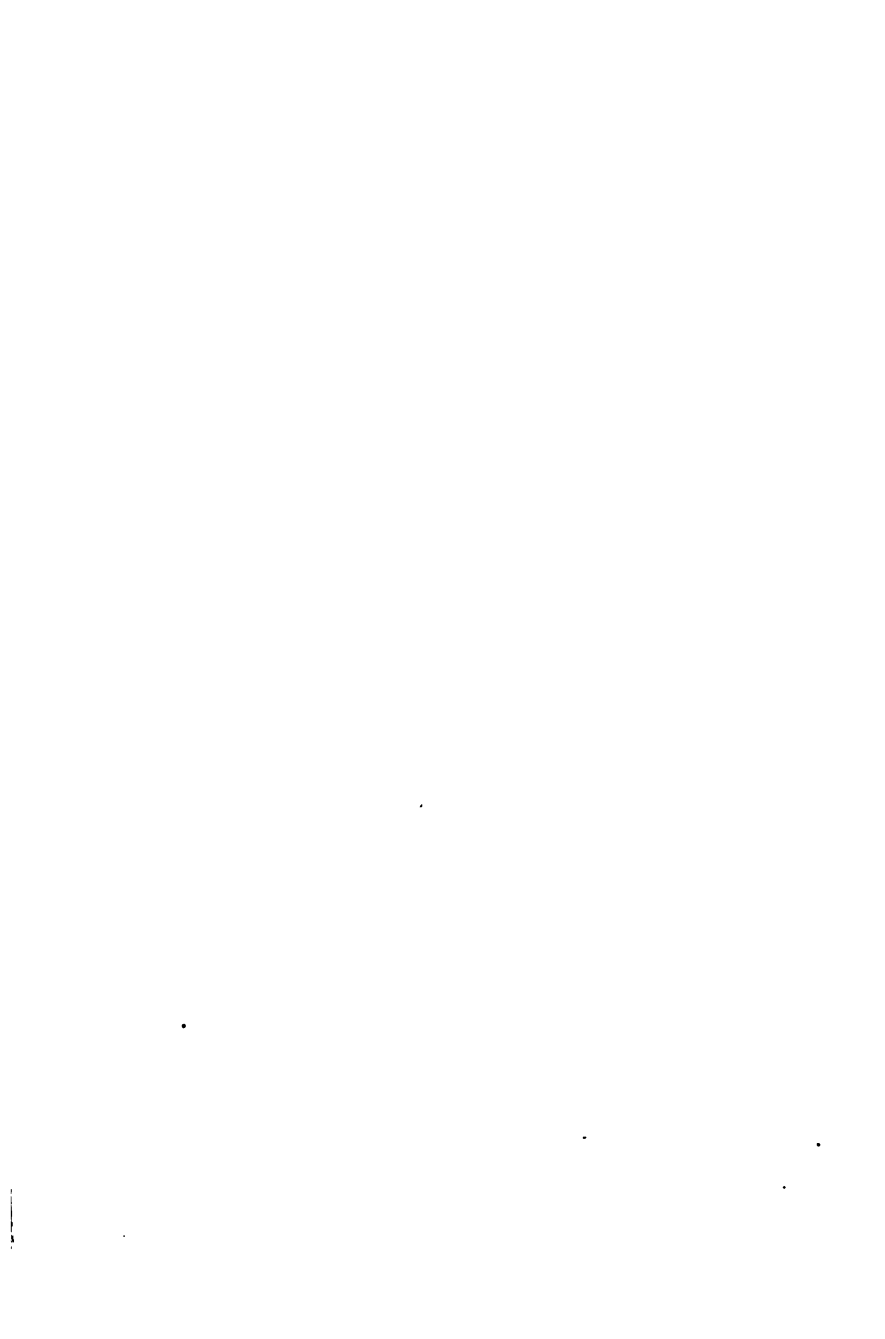
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